



THE AMERICA TEAM FOR DISPLACED ERITREANS

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ERITREA **FOLLOWING THE RAPPROCHEMENT WITH ETHIOPIA**

May 7, 2026

(Updates to this document will appear at <http://eritreanrefugees.org/reference-materials-2/>)

Dramatically, in June 2018 the prime minister of Ethiopia offered to make peace with Eritrea, his country's arch-enemy. Over the following weeks and months, Eritrea accepted the overture and normalization of relations flowered. After decades the two countries' mutual border was opened, families were reunited, and cross-border commerce and air travel resumed. Eritrea seized the opportunity to break with its long-standing hostility toward other neighbors as well, embarking on accords with Somalia, Sudan and Djibouti. Further seeking to shed its image as an international pariah, Eritrea sought and – remarkably – gained membership in the United Nations' Human Rights Council, even though the country was still being monitored by that body, and even though its leaders had been accused of crimes against humanity by the UN's Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea. Across the globe, governments were hoping that human rights abuses within Eritrea would soon abate.

But they have not abated. As of this writing, Eritreans must still serve indefinitely in the National Service, often in the military in slave-like conditions. Religious and political dissidents continue to languish in hellish prisons (even while some are occasionally released). Surveillance of personal speech and activities continues to be pervasive. Eritrea is still a brutal and corrupt police state, with no amelioration in sight. And even though the border with Ethiopia re-closed within a matter of months, many thousands of refugees have fled the country since June 2018, and they continue to flee.

Notably, when civil war broke out in November 2020 in the Ethiopian province of Tigray (which borders on Eritrea), Eritrean forces quickly joined with the Ethiopian assault, and they began perpetrating massive atrocities against the Eritrean regime's arch-enemies, the Tigrayans – including massacres, industrial-scale looting, the deployment of rape as an instrument of war, the imposition of forced starvation, and the plundering of ancient places of worship. Eritrean troops also savaged international law by occupying UNHCR-supported camps for Eritrean refugees in Tigray – killing some refugees there, and abducting many others back to Eritrea, where they stood to be punished for having fled the country, and/or to be conscripted for the war. The shocking events gave rise to widespread speculation that the Eritrean regime's entire purpose in the rapprochement with Ethiopia – far from becoming peaceful and relenting in the oppression of its own population – had been to obliterate the Tigrayans and to occupy Tigray. Indeed, with the

invasion of Tigray, the regime's need for military conscripts only increased. Substantial casualties at the front were reported, as was the round-up, conscription and deployment of 16-year-olds. The Eritrean troops in Tigray reportedly were ill-fed and were instructed to subsist in Tigray by pillage. Conscripts thus experienced double jeopardy: as perpetrators, and as victims.

The war in Tigray nominally ended in November 2022. But Eritrean forces continue to occupy and oppress parts of Tigray, and the Eritrean regime continues to brutalize its own people within its borders.

Because Eritrea remains walled-off from meaningful observation by international organizations and by the foreign press, it's impossible to know the details of circumstances within. But asylum seekers, the occasional returning foreign visitor, and networked Eritrean expatriates have confirmed the above assessment to The America Team. In addition, below are links to published reports that confirm this.

The America Team believes it essential that U.S. and other immigration authorities recognize that Eritrea's rapprochement with Ethiopia has not mitigated its human rights atrocities. In particular, Eritreans should not be denied asylum or Convention Against Torture protection on grounds that Eritrea is now a safe place to which they can be returned. To the contrary, having deserted the national service and/or having applied for asylum elsewhere is still considered by the Eritrean regime to be an act of treason, that could result in the individuals' imprisonment, torture or murder if they were refouled.

Reports on Continuing Human Rights Abuses within Eritrea

Human Rights Watch, May 6, 2026. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/05/06/us-seeks-to-lift-sanctions-on-eritrea> .

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Guidance Note on Eritrea (including, at p. 3, UNHCR's explicit call for countries to guarantee Eritreans the right to seek asylum, to respect the principle of non-refoulement, and to process Eritreans' protection claims fairly and efficiently), April 2026. <https://eritreanrefugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/UNHCR-guidance-note-final-april-2026.pdf> .

Human Rights Watch, World Report 2026 (events of 2025), February 4, 2026. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/eritrea> .

U.S. State Department (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor), 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, August 12, 2025: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/> .

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, May 12, 2025 . <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/24> .

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, May 30, 2025.

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2025/05/30/press/6534/article.htm> .

Human Rights Watch, May 22, 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/22/eritrea-adopt-strong-resolution-extending-special-rapporteurs-mandate> .

The Reporter - Ethiopia, April 19, 2025. <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/44662/> .

Migration Policy Institute, April 9, 2025. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/eritrea-refugees-repression> .

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, February 27, 2025. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/02/enhanced-interactive-dialogue-human-rights-eritrea> .

Human Rights Watch, World Report 2025 (events of 2024). <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/eritrea> .

The Guardian, January 20, 2025. https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/20/eritrea-torture-terror-prisons-former-prisoners?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other .

Human Rights Watch, World Report 2024 (events of 2023). https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/eritrea?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiAx9q6BhCDARIsACwUxu7wJl1QL3qAWDkqPTFGFyg_J66e7bKQsNP332oGbAF67f3KB8lCpk0aAh9FEALw_wcB .

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, May 7, 2024. <https://eritreanrefugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Spl-Rap-Report-Eritrea-May-2024.pdf> .
Summary of the Special Rapporteur's oral presentation to the UN's Human Rights Council by Voice of America, June 20, 2024: <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-rapporteur-fundamental-freedoms-systematically-repressed-in-eritrea/7663749.html> .

Amnesty International, State of the World's Human Rights Report, April 23, 2024: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/eritrea/report-eritrea/#:~:text=Eritrea%202023,arbitrary%20detention%20and%20enforced%20disappearance> .

U.S. State Department (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor), 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, April 22, 2024: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/> .

Voice of America, February 29, 2024. <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-rights-experts-eritrea-maintains-iron-grip-through-repression-systematic-impunity/7508459.html> .

Washington Post, January 6, 2024. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/01/06/eritrea-human-rights-prisons-torture/> .

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, interview in Fluechtlingshilfe (Switzerland), August 25, 2023. <https://www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/publikationen/news-und-stories/der-nationaldienst-in-seiner-jetzigem-form-ist-untrennbar-mit-zwangsarbeit-und-der-sklaverei-aehnlichen-praktiken-verbunden> and <https://martinplaut.com/2023/09/12/eritrea-national-service-is-inextricably-linked-to-practices-similar-to-slavery-dr-mohamed-abdelsalam-babiker/> .

U.S. State Department, Office of Trafficking in Persons, 2023 Country Reports, June 15, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/eritrea/> .

Walk Free, 2023 Global Slavery Index, May 24, 2023. <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/> .

AFP, May 24, 2023. <https://www.citizen.co.za/news/news-world/news-africa/eritreas-isaias-afwerki-ruthless-leader-of-an-isolated-nation/> . Deutsche Welle, May 23, 2023. <https://www.dw.com/en/from-liberator-to-oppressor-30-years-of-eritrea-under-isaias-afwerki/a-65708163> . Africa News, May 23, 2023. <https://www.africanews.com/2023/05/23/eritrea-authoritarian-regime-in-the-horn-of-africa/> . The Peninsula, May 23, 2023. <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/23/05/2023/what-would-i-be-celebrating-eritrea-marks-independence-anniversary> . (All on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia.)

Defend Defenders, Letter to the United Nations' Human Rights Council signed by 35 NGOs, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and The America Team for Displaced Eritreans, May 17, 2023. <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/eritrea-hrc-resolution-should-outline-human-rights-and-extend-the-special-rapporteurs-mandate/> .

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, May 9, 2023. <https://eritreanrefugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SR-Report-May-9-2023.pdf> .

Amnesty International, State of the World's Human Rights Report 2022/23, March 28, 2023, at p. 158. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/5670/2023/en/> .

U.S. State Department (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor), 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, March 20, 2023: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/> .

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, March 6, 2023. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/03/enhanced-interactive-dialogue-human-rights-eritrea> .

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, March 6, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/06/statement-eritrea-during-interactive-dialogue> .

Human Rights Watch, February 9, 2023: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/09/eritrea-crackdown-draft-evaders-families> .

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, May 6, 2022: <https://eritreanrefugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Spl-Rap-Report-Eritrea-May-2022.pdf>

U.S. State Department (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor), 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, April 12, 2022: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/> .

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, oral presentation to the Human Rights Council, March 4, 2022: <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1w/k1wa56dtbh> . Also reported in Voice of America, March 4, 2022 (noting that the war in Ethiopia is likely exacerbating forced conscriptions in Eritrea): <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-human-rights-violations-in-eritrea-continue-unabated-/6470721.html> .

United Kingdom Home Office, “Eritrea: National Service and Illegal Exit,” September 2021: <https://eritreanrefugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/UK-Home-Office-on-Nat-Service-Illegal-Exit-9-2021.pdf> .

Human Rights Concern Eritrea, August 16, 2021: <https://hrc-eritrea.org/egypt-two-vulnerable-eritreans-in-imminent-danger-of-forced-return-to-eritrea/> .

Human Rights Watch, June 22, 2021: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/22/international-scrutiny-dire-rights-situation-eritrea-must-continue#> .

EuroNews, June 21, 2021: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/06/20/eritrean-migrants-in-libya-claim-eu-backed-voluntary-returns-programme-isn-t-so-voluntary> .

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, May 12, 2021: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/47/21> .

PBS, “Escaping Eritrea” (landmark documentary video of Eritrean prison life, plus witness testimony about human rights abuses generally), May 4, 2021: <https://youtu.be/jquCbpLYw7Q> . Accompanying article: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/5-human-rights-crises-in-eritrea/> .

U.S. State Department (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor), 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, March 30, 2021: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/> .

Council of the European Union, March 22, 2021 (imposing sanctions on Eritrea for human rights violations). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/eu-imposes-further-sanctions-over-serious-violations-of-human-rights-around-the-world/> .

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, oral presentation to the Human Rights Council, February 24, 2021: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26794&LangID=E>

Human Rights Concern Eritrea (on the new extension of the Special Rapporteur's mandate), July 17, 2020: <https://hrc-eritrea.org/the-un-human-rights-council-takes-a-stand-for-justice/>

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, oral presentation to the Human Rights Council, June 30, 2020: <https://reliefweb.int/report/eritrea/44th-session-human-rights-council-interactive-dialogue-eritrea-statement-special>

Human Rights Watch, June 30, 2020: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/30/eritrea-lack-rights-reforms-highlight-ongoing-need-mandate-renewal>

AllAfrica, June 8, 2020: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202006080918.html>

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, annual report to the Human Rights Council, May 11, 2020: <https://undocs.org/a/hrc/44/23>

Human Rights Watch, April 21, 2020: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/21/ethiopia-unaccompanied-eritrean-children-risk#>

Amnesty International, Human Rights in Africa, Review of 2019, at p. 38, posted April 8, 2020: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr01/1352/2020/en/>

U.S. State Department (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor), 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, March 11, 2020: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/>

Freedom House, Freedom in the World Report, March 2020: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/eritrea/freedom-world/2020> and <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, presentation to UN Human Rights Council on February 26, 2020: as reported by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25620&LangID=E>

and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2020/02/human-rights-council-holds-separate-interactive-dialogues-situations-palestinian?LangID=E&NewsID=25620> ;
 as reported by VOA on March 1, 2020: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/un-decries-lack-reforms-and-widespread-abuse-eritrea>; and the text in full, as supplied by Eritrea Hub:
https://eritreahub.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/HRC43_SR-Eritrea_26.02.2020.pdf

Human Rights Watch, February 18, 2020: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/19/statement-european-parliaments-committee-development-human-rights-situation-eritrea>

Human Rights Watch, World Report 2020, January 18, 2020 +/-: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/eritrea>

New York Times, January 8, 2020 (report on EU development funds supporting slave labor):
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/08/world/europe/conscription-eritrea-eu.html?searchResultPosition=1>

VOA, December 10, 2019: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/ethiopian-pm-receives-nobel-peace-prize-peace-ground-questioned-0>

BBC Tigrinya Service, as reported by Eritrea Hub, November 18, 2019:
<https://eritreahub.org/eritreas-economy-a-year-after-the-lifting-of-un-sanctions>

France 24, October 18, 2019: <https://www.france24.com/en/20191018-stony-silence-from-eritrea-as-ethiopia-basks-in-nobel-glow>

Associated Press, October 12, 2019:
<https://www.apnews.com/7b7fe5a93ad6475a8102e04d15a27021>

The Washington Post, October 11, 2019:
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/10/11/why-eritrea-didnt-win-nobel-its-peace-agreement-when-ethiopia-did/>

European Asylum Support Office, September 2019 (extensive report on Eritrean country conditions): <https://www.easo.europa.eu/news-events/easo-publishes-country-origin-information-coi-report-eritrea> (summary) and
https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2019_EASO_COI_Eritrea_National_service_exit_and_return.pdf (complete report)

Voice of America, September 18, 2019: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/rights-groups-urge-release-journalists-eritrea-years-after-disappearances>

Human Rights Watch, September 18, 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/18/eritrea-should-end-18-years-darkness>

Amnesty International, September 17, 2019:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/09/eritrea-28-prisoners-of-conscience-detained-18-years-ago-must-be-immediately-and-unconditionally-released/>

The Irish Times, August 13, 2019: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/africa/from-school-to-the-grave-military-service-tears-families-apart-in-eritrea-1.3984975>

BBC Tigrinya Service, July 22, 2019: <https://www.bbc.com/tigrinya/news-49068852.amp>
(Google will translate)

Human Rights Watch, July 17, 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/09/interview-mass-exodus-eritrea>

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, presentation to UN Human Rights Council as reported by VOA, July 2, 2019:

<https://www.voanews.com/africa/un-rapporteur-eritrea-exodus-will-continue-absence-reforms;>
full written report, dated May 16, 2019: <https://reliefweb.int/report/eritrea/report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-eritrea-ahrc4153>)

Human Rights Concern Eritrea, June 28, 2019: <https://hrc-eritrea.org/ongoing-human-rights-violations-in-eritrea/>

Amnesty International, June 27, 2019: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/eritrea-government-officials-and-supporters-target-critics-abroad-as-repression-stretches-beyond-borders/> and <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR6405422019ENGLISH.PDF>

Mail & Guardian, June 11, 2019 (reporting on an open letter to Eritrea's president signed by over 100 prominent writers and activists and condemning Eritrean human rights conditions): <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-06-11-open-letter-to-eritreas-president-let-us-visit-detained-activists-and-journalists/>

Human Rights Watch, June 11, 2019 (reporting on an open letter to the United Nations Human Rights Council signed by 30 human rights organizations and condemning Eritrean human rights conditions): <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/12/letter-41st-session-un-human-rights-council-eritrea>

Defend the Defenders, May 2019: <https://www.defenddefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/HRC41-DefendDefenders-paper-on-ERITREA.pdf>

In-Depth News (International Press Syndicate), May 9, 2019: https://www.indepthnews.net/index.php/the-world/africa/2673-exodus-of-eritreans-in-post-peace-era-continues#.XNZzsA_eveU.twitter

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report, April 29, 2019:
https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_ERITREA_2019.pdf

VOA News, April 26, 2019: <https://www.voanews.com/a/in-eritrea-jailed-journalists-continue-to-languish/4892396.html>

All Africa, April 18, 2019: <https://allafrica.com/stories/201904180717.html>

Ha'aretz (Israel), April 4, 2019: <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-eritrea-s-capital-is-lovely-but-under-the-surface-is-a-terrifying-reality-1.7088041>

Human Rights Watch, April 3, 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/03/eritrea-another-birthday-behind-bars>

United Nations Human Rights Committee, March 28, 2019, as reported by VOA:
<https://www.voanews.com/a/un-urges-eritrea-to-clarify-fate-of-dozens-of-missing-people/4852583.html>

Human Rights Watch, March 11, 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/11/eritrea-should-permit-access-united-nations-special-rapporteur>

Freedom House, February 2019: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat> . See "Worst of the Worst" graphic at that link, and "The World at a Glance" rankings graphic on p. 16 of the full report.

Human Rights Concern Eritrea, February 5, 2019: <https://hrc-eritrea.org/open-letter-to-his-celleney-prime-minister-abiy-ahmed/>

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, January 2019:
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67744.pdf> . With pertinent passages highlighted by The America Team: <http://eritreanrefugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/UN-Report-on-Refugees-in-Ethiopia-Jan-2019.pdf>

The Globe and Mail (Canada), December 25, 2018:
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-in-secretive-eritrea-historic-reforms-across-the-border-have-sparked/>

News24 (South Africa), December 21, 2018: <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/27-000-eritreans-seeking-refugee-status-in-ethiopia-20181221>

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (U.S. Congress), November 19, 2018:
<https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/news/press-releases/co-chairs-ask-secretary-pompeo-press-human-rights-eritrea>

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, October 24, 2018: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23769&LangID=E>
UK Parliament, as reported by Assenna, October 21, 2018: <https://assenna.com/no-evidence-of-human-rights-reforms-in-eritrea-uk/>

The Guardian, October 12, 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/oct/12/eritrea-joy-becomes-ethiopia-burden-huge-exodus-refugees?CMP=share_btn_tw

Al Jazeera, October 12, 2018: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/peace-deal-ethiopia-changed-afwerki-eritrea-181010171517226.html>

Human Rights Watch, October 3, 2018: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/03/eritrea-diplomacy-changes-political-prisoners-remain>

VOA News, September 20, 2018: <https://www.voanews.com/a/former-top-eritrean-official-arrested-after-criticizing-president/4579616.html>

Assistant Secretary of State Tibor Nagy (U.S. State Department), September 12, 2018 (at p. 3): <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA16/20180912/108670/HHRG-115-FA16-Wstate-NagyT-20180912.pdf>

Human Rights Concern Eritrea, September 11, 2018: <https://hrc-eritrea.org/eritrea-hopes-for-democratic-change-and-reform-of-national-service/>