THE AMERICA TEAM FOR DISPLACED ERITREANS

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ERITREA FOLLOWING THE RAPPROCHEMENT WITH ETHIOPIA

November 9, 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.

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