Welcome to the United Nations

PRESS RELEASES | SPECIAL PROCEDURES

Eritrea: UN experts call for end to decades of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances

30 October 2026

GENEVA – UN experts* today expressed grave concern about ongoing patterns of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances in Eritrea, which have been occurring with impunity since 1991.

“For over 35 years, Eritreans have faced arbitrary arrests and detentions, often without charges or trial. They have been denied access to family, legal counsel, and judicial protection,” the experts said. “In hundreds of cases, the fate and whereabouts of persons deprived of their liberty remain unknown, inflicting ongoing anguish and distress on their families and communities.”

The experts highlighted the case of Bitweded Abraha, a veteran of Eritrea’s independence movement and former senior Government official.

“Mr. Abraha’s case is emblematic,” they said. “He was first arrested on 6 October 1991 and reportedly continues to be arbitrarily detained 35 years later.”

In 2018, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention determined that his detention was arbitrary and called for his immediate release and reparations in **Opinion No. 80/2018**.

Since September 2001, several former senior government officials, often known as the G-15, and journalists have been detained, such as Seyoum Tsehaye and Dawit Isaak, with their fate and whereabouts still unknown more than 25 years later, the experts said.

Many others have been detained for their faith, including Muslim and Christian leaders. Between 1991 and 1997, in 2005–2006 and again in

2013, hundreds of Muslim religious leaders were forcibly disappeared, mainly in the Gash-Barka and Northern Red Sea regions. They include Judge Mohamed Maranet as well as imams, teachers and community figures.

Seven Christian leaders have been held incommunicado, without charge, for more than two decades, including Haile Naizge, Kidane Weldou, Kiflu Gebremeskel, Meron Gebreselassie, Futsum Gebrenegus, Tekleab Menghisteab and Gebremedhin Gebregiorgis.

“The widespread or systematic use of prolonged arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and religious persecution may constitute crimes against humanity,” the experts said.

They called on the Eritrean Government to promptly and unconditionally free all individuals arbitrarily detained.

“Eritrean authorities must disclose the fate and whereabouts of those reported as disappeared, access for families and legal representatives, and thorough, independent, impartial and effective investigations to ensure accountability and provide proper remedies and adequate measures of reparation,” the experts said. “Hundreds of families live with the agony of uncertainty. They, and society at large, have a right to know the truth about their loved ones.”

They called on Eritrean authorities to stop these practices, protect fundamental rights, and ensure justice and accountability for victims and their families.

***The experts:**

- Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, the **Special Rapporteur on**

the situation of human rights in Eritrea

- Matthew Gillett (Chair-Rapporteur), Ethan Hee-Seok Shin (Vice-Chair on Follow-up) and Miriam Estrada Castillo, the **Working Group on Arbitrary Detention**.

- Grażyna Baranowska (Chair-Rapporteur), Ana Lorena Delgadillo Pérez (Vice-Chair), Gabriella Citroni, Aua Baldé and Mohammed Al-Obaidi, the **Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances**

Special Rapporteurs/Independent Experts/Working Groups are independent human rights experts appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council. Together, these experts are referred to as the **Special Procedures** of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. While the UN Human Rights office acts as the secretariat for Special Procedures, the experts serve in their individual capacity and are independent from any government or organisation, including OHCHR and the UN. Any views or opinions presented are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the UN or OHCHR.

Country-specific observations and recommendations by the UN human rights mechanisms, including the special procedures, the treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review, can be found on the Universal Human Rights Index **https://uhri.ohchr.org/en/**

UN Human Rights, country page – **Eritrea**

For inquiries and media requests, please contact: Paa Kwesi Affail Cudjoe **paa.cudjoe@un.org**

For media inquiries related to other UN independent experts please contact Hannah Hinsche (**hannah.hinsche@un.org**) or Dharisha Indraguptha (**dharisha.indraguptha@un.org**)

Follow news related to the UN's independent human rights experts on X: **@UN_SPExperts**.