

# ERITREA



## THE ISSUE:

Eritrea is one of the most closed off countries in the world and remains an unsafe place for political dissenters or anyone who attempts to escape its indefinite national service program.

Government critics outside the country are often harassed, intimidated, or even threatened by members of the ruling party (the only party permitted to operate in Eritrea). Those inside the country who publicly criticize or who are perceived as critical of the government are frequently arrested without being formally charged and are usually detained indefinitely, typically without access to a lawyer. Many human rights defenders and independent journalists have been subjected to enforced disappearance, with friends and relatives deprived of information about their fate or whereabouts for many years after their arrest.

Repression of political dissent in Eritrea continues, despite their 2018 peace deal with Ethiopia. In September 2018, three months after the restoration of relations between the two countries, Eritrean security forces arrested Berhane Abrehe, former Minister of Finance, barely a week after he published a book entitled *Eritrea Hagerey (Eritrea, My Country)*. The book criticized the Eritrean government and called on Eritreans to use peaceful means to bring about democracy in the country.

The repression also targets religious figures in the country. On December 18, 2019, the Department of State re-designated Eritrea one of the “Countries of Particular Concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated “systematic, ongoing, [and] egregious violations of religious freedom.”

## THE HUMAN COST:

22-year-old [Ciham Ali Ahmed](#) hasn't seen her family in five years. She's been in detention in Eritrea since she was 15 years old. Born in California, but raised in Eritrea, Ciham is a dual Eritrean and US national. In 2012 —aged just 15—Ciham was arrested after attempting to cross from Eritrea into Sudan. Anyone caught crossing this border is usually imprisoned for approximately six months, but despite never being charged with any crime, Ciham has remained in detention for more than six years.

Ciham is in incommunicado detention, meaning her family hasn't seen or heard from her in over five years. This is an enforced disappearance.

## TALKING POINTS:

- The United States is alarmed at the lack of human rights in Eritrea and calls upon the government President Isaias Afwerki to enact critically needed reforms such as ending indefinite military and national service.
- The United States calls upon President Isaias Afwerki to release journalists, religious figures and political dissidents and other Eritrean citizens such as Ciham Ali and end random imprisonments and enforced disappearances.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Mandate the Department of State to convene a consultation on Eritrea to develop recommendations for improving the protection of basic human rights in the country.
- Publicly call on the government of Eritrea to end indefinite military and national service.
- Call on the government of Eritrea to release journalists, religious figures, and political dissidents, and to end arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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