



**OpenDoors**

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PO Box 47

3840 AA Harderwijk

The Netherlands

T + 31 341 465 073

## United Nations Human Rights Council

### Universal Periodic Review – Eritrea

5 men and women, members of the Faith of Christ Church, who had been worshipping in a private home in Massawa were arrested on 6 January 2008. All of them were released again on 16 February 2008.

According to International Christian Concern, in January 2008, the government transferred Orthodox Church patriarch Abune Antonios who has been under house arrest since August 2005 to an undisclosed location in order to prevent any contact with him by members of a visiting delegation led by U.S. Congressman Donald Payne. Immediately after the departure of the congressman the security brought the Patriarch back to his residential house where he is kept under house arrest.

On 13 February, 10 members of the Full Gospel Church who had been incarcerated for 5 years in Assab's notorious military prison were released on bail. The 7 men and 3 women had been transferred from Assab to the Adi-Abyto prison six months ago where they refused to sign recantation statements.

In February 2008, 10 members of the Church of the Living God were arrested and held at Medefera police station, but released on bail on May 23, 2008.

In February 2008, it is reported that Taha Mohammed Nur, the leader of some 70 Eritrean Muslims jailed for over two years for opposing the government installed mufti, died. He was believed to be in his 60s. He was one of the founders of the Eritrean Liberation front and formerly a close associate of President Afwerki.

In May 2008, Police raid a private home in Adi-Kuala and arrested 25 Christians who gathered on Independence day to pray for the nation. The 20 men and 5 women all belong to the Medhane Orthodox renewal group. They are kept at Adi-Kuala. They were transferred to Adi- Kuala three days later (May 27), where they were subjected to harsh military punishment. In February 2009 it is confirmed that they had been moved to Mitire where they are enduring very harsh treatment.

In May 2008, 15 members of the Kale Hiwot church held at Keren police station were released. All were forced to pay 80,000 Nakfa (\$5330) per person as bail. Some were forced to surrender property deeds as bond to secure the bail demands. By February 2009 the deeds are still in possession of the police.



In the same month, police arrested 34 members of the Berhane Hiwet (Light of Life) church who gathered for prayer and fellowship in Keren. The arrested include 24 men and 10 women. The following day the 10 women were taken to the Adi-Abyto Military Confinement facility. By February 2009, 1 woman still remains at Adi-Abyto while the men have been transferred to Mitire.

On 8 June 2008, 8 Christian men held at Adi-Kuala prison were taken for Medical emergency attention as a result of torture by military personnel at the camp. Later on, the men were transferred to Mitire.

In Mid July 2008, Azib Simon (37) dies after she is refused treatment for severe Malaria in Wi'a Military Training centre. She was in prison since December 2007. Simon was the sister of former Eritrean television journalist Biniam Simon, who recently fled the country after abandoning his career at government controlled ERI-TV.

On 8 July 2008, 6 members of the Kale-Hiwot church, 11 members of the Full Gospel church in Assab and 15 members of the Rhema church in Assab are arrested at their homes. They were taken to Wi'a military camp. Among them were 7 women. One of the women was taken to Adi-Abyto Military Camp and released on bail of Nakfa 50,000 (\$3,400) on July 9. By February 2009, all but this one woman are still in Wi'a.

On 16 July 16 2008, 9 Jehovah's Witnesses are arrested in Asmara and held at Mai Serwa Military Camp. In February 2009 it is confirmed that there are 38 Jehovah's Witnesses being incarcerated. All are male and the figure includes 19 elderly men. All are kept at Police Station number 2 in Asmara.

On 5 August 2008, authorities locked up 8 high school students at a military training school in metal shipping containers for objecting to the burning of hundreds of Bibles. The 8 male students from the Sawa Defense Training Centre in Sawa, near Eritrea's border with Sudan, were incarcerated after military authorities confiscated more than 1,500 personal Bibles from new students arriving for the 2008-2009 academic year. The 8 students objected when military officials began burning the Bibles. By February 2009, these students still find themselves in prison.

In Mid-October 2008, 65 Evangelical Christians, including 14 women, are arrested. All were member of unregistered churches, such as the Kale Hiwot Church, Church of the Living God and Faith of Christ Church (which is viewed by the government as compliant). The arrest occurred in 5 places, namely Adi-Teklezan Deke Zereeu, Hagaze, Anseba, Dekemhare and Adi-Kuala. All arrested members of the Faith of Christ church were released after Religious Affairs officials explained to the security officials that this church is viewed as being compliant.



In Mid November, 2008, a total of 110 Christians were arrested all over the country(65, of which 17 women from the Kale-Hiwot in Barentu and Dekemhare, 25 from the Full Gospel church in Keren, and 3 from the Full Gospel Church in Mendefera and 20 from the Church of the Living God in Mendefera and Adi-Kuala).

On 27 November 2008, the campaign continued when 35 more members of the Kale-Hiwot Church in Dekemhare were taken. Among the arrested are 17 women and 2 elderly men in their eighties. The two elderly men have been moved to Mitire while the others remain at Dekemhare Police Station.

On 22 December 2008, it is reported that 49 key leaders of underground churches in the capital Asmara (including the Church of Living God, Medhanial Alem Revival Group and Philadelphia, Kale-Hiwot, Rhema, Full Gospel and Salvation by Christ churches) were taken over a two week period by security agents. All the leaders were taken from their homes and work places. Apparently their names appeared on a list of 180 persons compiled by government officials. In addition to the arrest of the 49 leaders, one office stationary store, one music shop and one printing press were sealed by the authorities in connection to their alleged religious activities.

On 2 January 2009, news was received of the death of Mogos Hagos Kiflom (37) who was being kept in Mitire. The exact date of his death is not known. Mogos was a member of the Rhema church in Eritrea. Sources say he died as a result of continued physical torture by the Military Commanders for his refusal to deny his faith.

On 11 January 2009, 15 male members (5 of them preachers) of the Kale Hiwot Church are arrested. They were taken from their homes in Keren. In addition, police in Asmara sealed off Semhare Printing Press and arrested its owner, Mr Tekeste Habtemichel for his alleged publishing of Christian materials in collaboration with underground churches.

On 16 January 2009, Mehari Gebreneguse Asgedom (42) dies in Mitire while under solitary confinement. Sources say he died as a result of ongoing physical torture and diabetics complications. As a member of the Church of the Living God in Mendefera, it is not known when he was arrested or when he was moved to Mitire.

In Mid February 2009, it is reported that there are more than 250 Muslim prisoners in Eritrea because of their opposition against the Eritrean Mufti. Furthermore, it is reported



that approximately 360 Christian believers are kept incommunicado and under severe conditions at Mitire Military Concentration Camp<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Open Doors news release No.307, March 18 2009. The Camp was recently established by the government in the northeast of the country, and known for its harsh conditions. Reportedly, Mitire Military Confinement has been established with the express purpose of punishing Christians who refuse to stop their religious activities despite the government's ban on them in 2002. Believers from prisons all over Eritrea have been moved to Mitire since its establishment.