

ERITREA



FIFTEEN FAST FACTS ABOUT ERITREA

- In 1993 Eritrea became an independent country and member of the United Nations following a long war of independence with Ethiopia which began in 1962.
- After independence, Eritrean troops invaded the Hanish islands in 1995. This sparked a conflict with Yemen which lasted until 1998.
- Border disputes with Ethiopia escalated into a full-scale war in 1999 which lasted until June 2000. This war led to an estimated 70,000 deaths. The Eritrean government has used this border dispute to justify repressive policies and continuing failure to respect civil and political rights. An UN-patrolled security zone

Capital: Asmara

Population: 5 million (UN, 2009)

Borders with: Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti

Major religion: Islam, Christianity

Major language: Tigrinya, Tigre, Arabic, English

Colonised, occupied or

administered by: Ethiopia,

Ottoman Empire, Italy, Britain

Why people flee: Arbitrary

arrests, detention without

trial, threat of torture, political

repression, compulsory military

service, religious persecution,

suppression of human rights

groups, food shortages



was agreed upon but the border dispute remains unresolved.

- Further violence broke out in June 2008 between Eritrea and Djibouti in the disputed Ras Doumeira border area. This was followed by a dispute with the UN in 2009 over the presence of Eritrean troops on Djiboutian soil.
- The UN Security Council voted unanimously in July 2008 to withdraw peacekeeping troops from the disputed border areas of Eritrea and Ethiopia despite warnings from UN Secretary General of further wars between the two states. Tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia were further exacerbated with both parties taking opposing sides in the conflict in Somalia.
- The UN World Food Programme estimates that war has contributed to food insecurity for more than two million people in Eritrea. War has left parts of the countryside riddled with landmines and some grain-producing areas can no longer be cultivated. Up to 70,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been living in makeshift camps for over five years.
- Eritrea is a one-party state, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) is the only party allowed to operate. Planned presidential elections in 1997 never materialised and President Isaias Afewerki remained in power.
- There is no privately-owned news media in the country after the government closed the private press in 2001 for 'endangering national security'. This followed publication of dissenting views from some National Assembly members. Reporters Without Borders rank Eritrea last out of 175 countries in their Press Freedom Index (2008).
- Arbitrary arrests and detention without trial are common. In 2001 the government started mass arrests of people who criticised the regime and many political leaders and journalists remain in detention. In 2009 Human Rights Watch said, "Eritrea's government is turning the country into a giant prison... Eritrea should immediately account for hundreds of 'disappeared' prisoners and open its jails to independent scrutiny."
- Once in detention, prisoners are often held in secret facilities, crowded into unventilated cargo containers and held in underground cells. Torture, indefinite solitary confinement, starvation rations, lack of sanitation and hard labour are all commonplace. Prisoners, even when severely ill, rarely receive any medical care and death in custody is common.



- Meetings of more than three to five persons are forbidden without permits and all labour unions are controlled by the PFDJ. No domestic human rights organisations are allowed to operate and foreign human rights organisations are refused admission.
- Military service is compulsory for men and women for an initial period of 18 months. In practice, this can be extended indefinitely and people may then be put to work on projects personally benefiting military commanders. Since 2005 the families of anyone evading conscription have been fined the equivalent of \$3,300 (the average per capita income is less than \$1,000 per year) and since late 2006, some family members have been recruited in the place of the missing conscripts. Thousands of young men are reported to have fled the country as a result of enforced conscription. There is no exemption from military service for conscientious objectors.
- The only religious groups allowed to operate in Eritrea are Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox Christian and traditional Muslim groups. Members of other religious groups are frequently persecuted. At any one time, an estimated 2,000 members of unregistered churches are in detention where they may be beaten or abused to force them to renounce their faiths.
- Egypt, Sudan, Germany, Sweden and the UK forcibly returned Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers from November 2007 onwards. These forced returns disregarded the fate of earlier returnees who had been arbitrarily detained and tortured, and ignored UNHCR guidelines which strongly recommend against any forced returns to Eritrea because of Eritrea's poor human rights record. Eritrean refugees are particularly singled out as 'traitors' or spies by the Eritrean government.
- From 2000 to 2008, 12,800 Eritrean nationals (not including dependents) applied for sanctuary in the UK. In 2006, Eriteans made up the largest national group of people applying for asylum. In 2008, 59% of initial decisions on Eritrean claims were positive: the highest proportion for any single nationality. In the same year, 45% of appeals determined on Eritrean cases were allowed: again the highest proportion for any single nationality.

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TO LEARN ABOUT ERITREA...



CHECK OUT OUR SOURCES

Amnesty International (2008) *Amnesty International Report 2008 'Eritrea'*
<<http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Africa/Eritrea>> (accessed on 13/07/09)

Amnesty International (2009) *Amnesty International Report 2009 'Eritrea'*
<<http://thereport.amnesty.org/en/regions/africa/eritrea>> (accessed on 16/12/09)

BBC (2008) 'Country Profile: Eritrea'
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1070813.stm>
(accessed on 16/12/09)

BBC (2008) 'Timeline: Eritrea'
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1070861.stm>
(accessed on 16/12/09)

Google Maps UK (2008) 'Eritrea'
<http://maps.google.co.uk/maps?hl=en&q=eritrea+map&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&oi=geocode_result&resnum=1&ct=title>
(accessed on 13/07/09)

Human Rights Watch (2008) *World Report 2008 'Eritrea'*
<<http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/eritre17746.htm>>
(accessed on 16/12/09)

Human Rights Watch (2009) *World Report 2009 'Eritrea'*
<<http://www.hrw.org/en/node/79224>>
(accessed on 16/12/09)

Human Rights Watch (2009). 'Eritrea: Repression Creating Human Rights Crisis'.
16 April 2009. <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/04/16/eritrea-repression-creating-human-rights-crisis>>
(accessed on 16/12/09)

Reporters Without Borders (2009) 'Country card: Eritrea'
<<http://www.rsf.org/en-rapport15-Eritrea.html>>
(accessed on 16/12/09)

World Food Programme (2009) 'Country profile: Eritrea'
<<http://www.wfp.org/countries/eritrea>>
(accessed on 16/12/09)





WATCH

Heart of Fire, directed by Luigi Falorni

Looking For The Sun, directed by Yonatan Kelib
<<http://www.lookingforthesun.org/about.html>>

Teza, directed by Haile Gerima
< <http://www.tezathemovie.com>>



READ

Children of the Revolution by Dinaw Mengestu

Heart of Fire by Senait Mehari

Held at a Distance: A Rediscovery of Ethiopia by Rebecca G. Haile

I Didn't Do It for You by Michaela Wrong

My Father's Daughter by Hannah Pool

Towards Asmara by Thomas Keneally

The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat by Ryszard Kapuscinski

Wonders of the African World by Henry Louis, Jr. Gates

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