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## ERITREA CSW concerned for refugees forcibly detained in Sinai Desert

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CSW is gravely concerned for the safety and wellbeing of 80 Eritrean refugees who have been held hostage by people smugglers on the Egypt-Israel border for the last month.

According to the Italian NGO Agenzia Habesha, the people smugglers are demanding payment of US\$8,000 per refugee before releasing them.

According to CSW's sources, around 600 Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali and Sudanese nationals are being held in degrading conditions in the Sinai desert. They are being threatened, restrained with chains around their ankles, and at one stage were denied water to clean themselves for 20 days. The refugees reportedly set off from Tripoli in Libya for Israel, having paid US\$2,000 to people smugglers.

The exploitation of asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa by people traffickers is an ongoing problem. In August, AFP news agency reported the deaths of six Eritreans on the Egypt-Israel border, four of whom were killed in a dispute with people smugglers. In June, ten African refugees, including Eritreans, were reportedly killed by human smugglers in Sinai after they had been held for more than two months in secret underground locations. The smugglers are allegedly using extreme methods of torture, including electric shocks, to force the victims make the illegal payments.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "It is unacceptable that a group of people who are entitled to protection under international law are being treated in this manner. It is also difficult to comprehend how these people smugglers are able to continue holding such a large number of people hostage for such a lengthy period of time, and with seeming impunity. As current chair of the UNHCR's governing body and a signatory to the UN and African refugee conventions, the Egyptian government has a duty to end this situation and bring Egypt's treatment of refugees into line with international norms by ensuring that these and other refugees are afforded full protection and assistance".