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## ERITREA Concerns about possible sale of refugees held hostage in Sinai

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Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is gravely concerned by reports that around 100 of the 250 Eritrean refugees being held hostage by Bedouin people traffickers in the Sinai Desert have been moved overnight.

The Eritreans are part of a much larger group of refugees and asylum seekers from Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia who have been imprisoned for over a month in degrading conditions. Despite paying US\$2,000 for passage to Israel, these people have been held hostage for months on the outskirts of a town in the Sinai Desert in purpose-built containers, while Bedouin people traffickers demand payment of up to US\$8,000 per person for their release. CSW has also been informed that prior to separating and moving some of the Eritreans, the traffickers tore up the refugees' religious materials and assaulted them severely for failing to make these payments.

The exploitation of asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa by people traffickers in the Sinai Desert is an ongoing problem. Kidnapping, organ trafficking and the trading of groups of asylum seekers between different gangs is common, and there are fears that the 100 Eritreans may have been sold on to other dealers in the area.

On 1 December CSW, Agenzia Habeshia, EveryOne Group and Human Rights Concern Eritrea issued a joint appeal calling for urgent international intervention and highlighting the degrading and inhumane conditions suffered by the refugees, who have suffered extreme methods of torture, including electric shocks, as well as being bound by chains around their ankles and denied adequate food and water. Agenzia Habeshia and the Everyone group also filed a lawsuit in Cairo against named traffickers, and passed on details of the location of the initial detention facility. Although the Egyptian government professes to be making "round the clock" efforts to free the victims, there has been no real sign of progress.

CSW's National Director Stuart Windsor said, "The latest news that some of the refugees have been moved suddenly and under cover of darkness is deeply worrying. The welfare of the remaining refugees is also of great concern. It is clear that their situation is deteriorating rapidly. The entire international community must mobilize to increase pressure on the Egyptian government to take effective measures to liberate these people, and to grant them the protection that they are entitled to as refugees under international law, as well as unhindered access to the local branch of the UNHCR."