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## ERITREA | CSW Calls for End to Human Rights Violations in Eritrea

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) renews its call for an end to human rights violations in Eritrea, including the abuse of freedom of religion or belief, ahead of the 11th anniversary of a government crackdown on all but three Christian denominations and the start of mass detentions of Eritrean Christians.

On May 15, 2002, all churches, except those belonging to the Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran denominations, were effectively banned, and the era of mass arrests of Christians began. Over 2,000 Christians are currently detained in Eritrea without charge or trial, often in life threatening conditions pending denial of their faith.

Initially members of independent evangelical and charismatic churches were singled out. Even permitted churches, eventually, began to experience persecution. Orthodox patriarch Abune Antonios has been under house arrest since 2006 for resisting government interference in church affairs. Priests seen as sympathizing with him are detained, harassed, forced out of the church, or conscripted following the 2005 revocation of clerical exemption by the government. The government has also attempted to seize Catholic schools and projects, and the conscription of seminarians and other church workers is reportedly occasioning a shortage of personnel.

CSW will join six organizations from the UK and Ireland in a [protest vigil](#) against human rights abuses in Eritrea outside the Eritrean embassy in London on May 30, which will be followed by an evening of prayer for the nation.

Eritrea is one of the world's most repressive regimes, often likened to North Korea. It is a single party state dominated by a dictatorial president, and the military pervades every aspect of society, including the economy. The regime demands total allegiance, thus Christians are perceived as a threat to national unity due to their ultimate allegiance to a higher being.

Thousands of Eritreans flee their country every year, risking a government shoot-to-kill border policy. They are at risk of being held hostage in torture camps in the Sinai Desert by abusive people traffickers, pending payment of exorbitant ransoms, or the forcible removal of organs. Many are fleeing military conscription, which can last indefinitely and is mandatory for all citizens aged between 18 and 48 years. The Eritrean security services have been known to pursue or harass refugees in foreign countries through their agents abroad. Countries such as Sudan and Egypt have, in the past, forcibly returned Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers despite evidence of the severe mistreatment of returnees.

On July 6, 2012 The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted its [first resolution on Eritrea](#), approving the mandate for a Special Rapporteur who will report to the HRC and the UN General Assembly on the human rights situation in Eritrea.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW is pleased to join with the British Orthodox Church, Church in Chains-Ireland, the Evangelical Alliance-Wales, Human Rights Concern-Eritrea, Release Eritrea and Release International to protest the human rights abuses perpetrated by the Eritrean government on its people. We will continue to stand in solidarity and work alongside Eritreans who long for justice until they and their fellow citizens are able to enjoy all of the rights and freedoms enshrined in the nation's constitution."