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ERITREA: Edited Testimony of Torture

Whilst worshipping in the desert, along with eight others during his term of military service, this singer was captured by military police. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment in a military prison and was released, but was seen as a suspect. The military police told him to leave his faith and that they would let him live if he did, if not, he would be killed. He was also told not to sing, or gather with other Christians, or read the Bible, and was asked to sign a letter attesting to this, but refused to do so.

One of the colonels eventually rounded up all identified Christians and told them they would be imprisoned for three years.

He was separated from the others. The area was very hot, and they were each held in cells four metres underground for six months. He was only allowed out to eat in the morning or to go to bathroom, and he was not allowed to communicate with anyone else.

However, all of the prisoners had managed to smuggle in bibles, which they hid in the holes in the ground they had dug in their cells, so that guards could not find them. One day the guards decided to conduct a thorough search of all of the underground cells and found the bibles. He took responsibility on behalf of the others, saying he had brought all of the items with him when he arrived.

He was tortured. His legs and hands were shackled and he was placed outside in this desert area for 24 hours over five days. During the day time he was directly under the sun. He is bald; consequently, the skin on the top of his head was removed by the hot sun. After five days, he was placed under a tree; however, trees in the area had no leaves, and so did not offer any significant shade. The wind there was so hot that it burned him. All in all, he was tied up outside for a month.

He also faced what is known as “military punishment. This includes:

- Running exercises in the heat.
- He was told to lie on his back and ordered to look at the sun, while the hot soil burned his back.

He actually prayed to die, as this would have been better than the pain he was enduring.

He was subsequently placed in solitary confinement for five months in a specially constructed punishment cell that was 2m long, 70cm wide and 2 ½ metres high. He could not turn around, straighten his knees or move his legs. He could only stretch his legs once the door was opened. The food he received was inedible, and when light trickled into the cell, it caused problems for his eyes. He was informed he no longer had the right to more food, to use the bathroom, to exercise, or to go to the hospital. During this time he developed persistent problems with his knees, stomach, and eyes. His teeth also deteriorated because the bread he received was so hard and dry that it could barely be eaten. When they released him five months later, his health had deteriorated so badly that he urinated blood for fifteen days.