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ERITREA | Rapporteur Highlights Violations During Historic Address

In her first "interactive dialogue" with the UN General Assembly on Oct. 24, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea urged the Eritrean government to ensure that its people are able to "live in dignity" and challenge human rights violations "without the threat of reprisal".

During the meeting at the General Assembly in New York, the Special Rapporteur stated that she was "extremely concerned about the human rights situation in Eritrea, where the most serious human rights violations are being committed." Her report on Eritrea details "extrajudicial killing, enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, inhumane prison conditions, indefinite national service, and lack of freedom of expression and opinion, assembly, association, religious belief and movement."

The dialogue was the first time the Special Rapporteur had engaged formally with the General Assembly and represented an important development for those seeking to put a spotlight on Eritrea's human rights record.

Human Rights Concern Eritrea, CSW, Amnesty International, FIDH and Human Rights Watch later jointly hosted a side meeting on Eritrea at which five Eritrean victims gave their personal testimonies, including 16-year-old Meaza Petros Solomon, who spoke movingly of her father being detained incommunicado since Sept. 18 2001 and her mother since 2004.

Elsa Chyrum, Director of Human Rights Concern Eritrea said, "Although the human rights situation is extremely alarming in Eritrea, this is the first time that it has been brought to the attention of the General Assembly by the UN-appointed Special Rapporteur. It is clear the recent Lampedusa tragedy, which resulted in the loss of over 350 lives, the vast majority of whom were Eritrean, has had an impact on the consciences of many state governments, leading to questions being asked relating to the root causes of those who were fleeing. We expect the international community to ensure more pressure is placed on the Eritrean

government to stop abusing and violating its own people's rights.”

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of CSW, said, "This is the first time that the domestic human rights tragedy in Eritrea has been discussed by the UN General Assembly and is the culmination of significant hard work by organizations like Human Rights Concern Eritrea and CSW. However, this is only a small step towards our ultimate goal: seeking justice and real change for all Eritreans. We commend the Special Rapporteur on her statement to the General Assembly and urge the international community to join her in speaking out against the ongoing atrocities in Eritrea, and to urgently formulate effective measures to end the suffering."