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ERITREA | 122 Christians Detained

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) was informed that 122 Eritrean Christians were detained during the month of May in a series of round-ups of members of unregistered denominations in various locations around the country.

The detentions mark a new phase in a crackdown that has been ongoing since May 2002, when the Eritrean government effectively outlawed religious practices not affiliated with the Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran and Orthodox Christian denominations or Sunni Islam.

Forty-five Christians, including entire families, elderly men and a disabled woman, were taken from their homes in Adi Quala town in the south of the country and transported to Adi Aglis detention camp. The arrests left 23 children without their parents.

Fifteen Christians were arrested in Gindae town in the Northern Red Sea Region, in an ongoing operation that has forced others to flee to safer areas.

In the Godaif district of the capital Asmara, 17 Christians were rounded up on May 28. Forty-five others, mostly women, were rounded up one week earlier in another part of the city as they gathered at a party arranged by a recently married couple. Further arrests are anticipated as local district committees, composed of members of the security services, the ruling party, the local administration and the Orthodox Church, continue their house to house inquiries. Christians in the city have begun a period of prayer and fasting for peace and safety.

In her latest report to the Human Rights Council (HRC), Sheila B. Keetharuth, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Eritrea, noted that “the practice of arbitrary arrest and detention of individuals based on their religious belief continues,” and referenced earlier arrests in Ghindae and Adi Quala, as well as the continuing detention of Patriarch Antonios of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. Among the report’s recommendations is a call for the immediate and

unconditional release of “all those unlawfully and arbitrarily detained, including members of the G-15, journalists and members of religious groups.”

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “These arrests signify a renewed intensity in the crackdown that has been ongoing since 2002, and are a clear indication that the severe repression of freedom of religion or belief continues unabated in Eritrea. In her latest report, the Special Rapporteur noted that Eritrea has ignored the bulk of recommendations from her previous reports, while those made by the Commission of Inquiry have gone unheeded. In view of the continuing violations and lack of cooperation, we call on the HRC to support the renewal of the Special Rapporteur’s mandate, and also to urge the international community to ensure that perpetrators of crimes against humanity are held accountable, including through universal jurisdiction, whenever this is appropriate.”