

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. RES. _____

Recognizing widespread decades-long human rights abuses in Eritrea, including indefinite imprisonment, inhumane prison conditions, and the absence of democratic institutions, and expressing support for the rights and freedom of the Eritrean people.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. DURBIN (for himself, Mr. SCHIFF, and Mr. COONS) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on

RESOLUTION

Recognizing widespread decades-long human rights abuses in Eritrea, including indefinite imprisonment, inhumane prison conditions, and the absence of democratic institutions, and expressing support for the rights and freedom of the Eritrean people.

Whereas, in 1993, Eritrea held a United Nations-supervised referendum in which 99.8 percent of voters supported independence from Ethiopia, leading to international recognition of Eritrea as a sovereign state;

Whereas pro-independence politician Isaias Afwerki was chosen by the National Assembly as the country's first post-independence President, and he has remained in that po-

sition since 2013, even though Eritrea has never held a national election;

Whereas, in the years immediately following independence, the Provisional Government of Eritrea convened a Constitutional Commission to draft a new constitution, a process which—

(1) included input from economic and social groups, civil society, and diaspora communities; and

(2) sought to enshrine democratic rights and freedoms for the people of Eritrea;

Whereas, when the Constitution of Eritrea was unanimously approved and ratified in 1997, it included key freedoms, rights to participate “in any position of leadership in the country” and “conditions necessary for developing a democratic political culture”, the “right to vote”, the “guarantee” to actively participate in “all political life”, and the right to a “fair, speedy, and public” trial and “due process” of law;

Whereas, despite ratification, the Constitution was never formally implemented, and since independence, Eritrea has yet to hold a national election, remaining a one-party state ruled by President Isaias Afwerki without a functioning legislature, independent judiciary, or free press;

Whereas President Afwerki exercises de facto control over legislative functions, including the National Assembly, which has not met since 2002;

Whereas, since independence, President Afwerki’s government has maintained a highly repressive grip on society through the use of arbitrary detention, mass surveillance, and control of all religious and civic organizations;

Whereas, in 2001, the Government of Eritrea shut down all independent press and arrested a group of high-ranking former political leaders who called for democratic reforms, known as the “G-15”;

Whereas the 2016 United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Government of Eritrea had committed “crimes against humanity” in a “widespread and systematic manner” against its own population, including imprisonment, enslavement, enforced disappearance, persecution, and torture;

Whereas the 2019 UNHCR Global Trends Report ranked Eritrea among the top 10 countries of origin for refugees, with more than 500,000 displaced in part due to political repression and systemic human rights abuses;

Whereas the 2024 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council found the human rights situation in Eritrea remains dire, with no signs of institutional or policy reform, as citizens are subjected to indefinite national service, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, transnational repression, and a deeply entrenched culture of fear;

Whereas Eritrea’s extensive prison system includes secret and unofficial detention centers where detainees are held indefinitely and often without notification of charges or access to legal representation;

Whereas prisoners in Eritrea are routinely subject to inhumane and life-threatening conditions, including—

(1) overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, including in underground bunkers or shipping containers;

- (2) extreme temperatures; and
- (3) denial of adequate food, water, and medical care;

Whereas Eritrea has consistently refused to cooperate with the United Nations Special Rapporteur or allow access for the United Nations Special Rapporteur to conduct oversight on the country's human rights conditions;

Whereas religious persecution remains widespread in Eritrea, with members of faiths not recognized by the government routinely imprisoned and subjected to torture and other cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment for practicing their beliefs;

Whereas Eritrea's national service program was initially mandated to last 18 months, but has become indefinite and compulsory in practice for a significant portion of the population, trapping thousands of youths into years of effectively state-sponsored forced labor;

Whereas the 2024 and 2025 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index ranked Eritrea last out of 180 countries, describing Eritrea as an "information desert" where no independent media outlets exist and journalists face indefinite detention without trial; and

Whereas Eritrea remains diplomatically isolated as a result of its entrenched autocracy and refusal to engage in human rights reforms—an isolation that comes at a great cost to the Eritrean people: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

- 2 (1) condemns the Government of Eritrea's sys-
- 3 temic human rights violations and abuses, which in-
- 4 clude arbitrary and indefinite detention, religious
- 5 persecution, and torture;

1 (2) calls on the Government of Eritrea to—

2 (A) release all unjustly and arbitrarily de-
3 tained political prisoners;

4 (B) provide for the human rights and fun-
5 damental freedoms called for in its Constitu-
6 tion;

7 (C) provide an opportunity for the Eri-
8 trean people to democratically choose their lead-
9 ers; and

10 (D) allow the United Nations Special
11 Rapporteur to access the country;

12 (3) stands with the Eritrean people in their as-
13 piration for democratic governance, dignity, and
14 freedom; and

15 (4) welcomes the prospect of stronger ties with
16 Eritrea as the country takes meaningful steps to
17 open its political system and advance human rights
18 and fundamental freedoms.