

The tragedy of eritrean refugees caught up in libyan and sinai desert, egypt



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The Plight of Eritrean Refugees in Libya and Egypt Dear Sir/Madam, I would like to write to you on the problem of Eritrean refugees in Libya and Egypt, with a view to achieving a positive solution to that issue. The urgency and potential negative repercussions of hesitating in solving the issue will be all-understandable in the course of the outline I purport to present to you. The direct cause of the current abysmal situation that is often summarised as the “ Eritrean Refugee Crisis” might be traced to the turbulent events of the second half of the 20th century. At the end of the 19th century, Eritrea was colonized by Italians and was eventually turned into the base for the former’s colonial expansion into neighbouring Ethiopia and Sudan. After WWII, the United Nations decided to establish a union between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which came into being in 1952. However, virtual refusal of Ethiopian government to take the interests of Eritrean population into consideration brought about the beginning of a large-scale Liberation War, which lasted for almost thirty years. It is widely believed among Eritreans and non-Eritreans alike that these events and the failure of the international community to prevent Ethiopia from its abuse proved to be a root of the current suffering in Eritrea. In 1974, the Soviet Union became aligned with Ethiopia when a military junta overthrew the traditionalist autocratic regime of Emperor Haile Selassie. Soon, the war escalated when \$11 billion in new arms from Moscow were delivered to Ethiopia’s government. The second wave of refugees fled to Sudan. Fighting had reached the heart of the Eritrean capital, Asmara, which changed the demographics of the refugees, who now included both urban and rural residents. In the course of the next 13 years (until 1991), thousands of Eritrean and Ethiopian citizens and combatants alike perished as the war continued. In May 1991 the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (the <https://assignbuster.com/the-tragedy-of-eritrean-refugees-caught-up-in-libyan-and-sinai-desert-egypt/>)

current ruling political force of Eritrea) expelled the Ethiopian army and assisted in ousting the Marxist-Leninist government of Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, the new Eritrean government would prove equally, if not more, oppressive than the previous Ethiopian occupying authorities. The government of Eritrea, led by Isaias Afwerki since 1991, exhibits tendencies towards brutal authoritarian rule, imprisoning its opponents and banning independent circulation of information. The situation is further aggravated by virtual economic collapse of the nation, precipitated by the events of Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict of 1998-2000, used by the government to cement its power. Many reliable sources identify the Eritrean government as one of the worst violators of human rights in the world. Reports about the government's ever-growing draconian rule are abundant at every quarter of human rights advocacy groups. According to a recent research, Eritrea is said to have moved away from the 'cautious authoritarianism' of the pre-1997 years to a 'full-fledged authoritarianism' after the 1998-2000 border conflict with Ethiopia. Similarly, the Eritrean President, Isaias Afwerki, was included in the 2004 list of the World's Worst Dictators and Dishonoured Mentions. Freedom of speech is one of the severely curtailed rights in Eritrea. A prominent media report published in October 2007 ranked Eritrea the worst country in the world in media freedom. Credible global indicators measuring economic progress and development indicate that Eritrea ranks the last or near the bottom in the world and indeed below most African countries ("The Eritrean Refugees and Human Rights Crisis"). Consequently, such a dismal situation was reflected in Eritrea's economic and data.

According to the 2006 Human Development Report of the UNDP, the Human Development Index (HDI) for Eritrea is 0.454, which gives Eritrea a rank of <https://assignbuster.com/the-tragedy-of-eritrean-refugees-caught-up-in-libyan-and-sinai-desert-egypt/>

157 out of 177 countries. Another most reliable worldwide indicator on nourishment is the Global Hunger Index (GHI), published by the German Agro Action (DWHH) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). This report, released on 12 October 2007, has ranked Eritrea third from bottom in terms of hunger; this means 116th from 118 countries assessed by the report. As a result of a shrinking economy, Eritrea was able to meet only 19% of its own food needs in 2005. Eritrea is also governed by one of the most corrupt governments in the world. According to Transparency International, Eritrea was ranked 111 out of 180 countries surveyed by a 2007 global corruption perceptions index. All of the factors outlined above are helpful in understanding the motivation of the masses of Eritrean citizens who leave their mother nation and pursue supposedly better living abroad. According to data from the UNHCR (The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), there were almost 210, 000 refugees from Eritrea in 2009, of whom only 2, 500 benefited from UNHCR refugee resettlement programs that year (“ Eritrea: Refugees and Responsibilities”). However, what are the conditions of these refugees and how are they treated by the authorities of such nations as Egypt and Libya? The answer to this question is damning: they are routinely mistreated both by indifferent authorities and by often hostile groups of local population. In Egypt, for instance, the number of Eritrean refugees recognised by the UNHCR by the end of 2004 was merely 158. In 2000, the invocation of the cessation clause by the UNHCR and the Eritrean government caused Eritrean refugees in Sudan to flee to Egypt because of their fear of forcible repatriation. By 2003, it was estimated that the numbers of Ethiopian and Eritrean in Egypt amounted to around 5000, the majority of whom have had their asylum

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claims rejected by the UNHCR. In 2008, the Egyptian government began the forcible repatriation of over 1000 Eritrean refugees held in several prisons around the country. On 11 June 2008, more than 200 refugees were forcibly repatriated to Eritrea, where their fate was likely dismal. In 2010, more than 250 Eritrean refugees were forcibly apprehended by local Bedouin tribes in Sinai Peninsula, with the ransom of \$ 8, 000 per person being demanded. The captured Eritreans were subjected to especially cruel and inhumane treatment, with the women being routinely raped and generally humiliated. According to testimonies of the captured Eritreans that were lucky to be released, they initially tried to reach relative safety in Israel by paying human smugglers \$2, 000 per person for their traffic, but were betrayed and surrendered to Bedouin tribals. The situation with these refugees on the Egypt-Israel border is still undecided, as Sinai Peninsula is generally neglected by Egyptian law-and-order services. In addition, the continuing repression against Eritrean immigrants in Egypt still poses a major problem, as many of them are held in custody merely for the fact of being migrants, without any formal accusations presented. The conditions in these prisons are desperate. The cells are vastly overcrowded and lack adequate access to basic human necessities, such as toilet facilities. Most of the prisoners are suffering from malnourishment and poor hygiene. For instance, in March 2011, a young Eritrean refugee suffering from diabetes died from his ailments while in prison, without any treatment provided by the prison's medical staff. In May 2011, a similar case was reported from the Egyptian prison in the city of Ismailia (" Eritrean Charity"). In Libya, the situation of Eritrean refugees is currently compounded by the Libyan Civil War, with many pro-rebel Libyans blaming refugees and guest workers for alleged

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mercenary activities. This resulted in the recorded cases of persecution and general indifference towards the fates of hundreds of Eritrean migrants that became stranded in Libya. The numerous cases of abduction and maltreatment were reported in the media. For instance, in February 2011, a group of Eritrean refugees working for the construction company in Benghazi were physically attacked by opposition supporters, with two Eritreans shot dead and twenty five more having to seek shelter in the underground hideout. On 22 February 2011, the group of armed men abducted nineteen Eritreans in Tripoli, with the latter's whereabouts since unknown. The problems of Eritrean refugees in Libya are further compounded by the widespread movement of refugees from Libya itself to the EU. Such journeys are compounded by the risks entailed by the precarious state of current Mediterranean communications; on 7 April, a boat carrying more than 200 migrants fleeing Libya capsized near Maltese coasts, leading to death or missing of more than 130 people (Ljubomir). My own relatives are missing due to the similar accident that happened in the Mediterranean on 22 March 2011. Therefore, I urge you to turn your attention to the problems of Eritrean refugees in Egypt and Libya and to take all measures necessary to alleviate the situation. Sincerely yours, Mebrak Habteselassie Works Cited " Eritrea: Refugees and Responsibilities." allAfrica. com. AllAfrica, 12 May 2011. Web. 6 June 2011. " Eritrean Charity Reports Ongoing Concerns for Refugees in Egypt." Asmarino. com. Asmarino Independent, 13 May 2011. Web. 6 June 2011. Milas, Ljubomir. " Scores Missing After Libya Refugee Boat Capsizes." Asmarino. com. Asmarino Independent, 7 Apr. 2011. Web. 6 June 2011. " The Eritrean Refugees and Human Rights Crisis." IFAANet. org. IFAANET Website, 28 Nov. 2008. Web. 6 June 2011.

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