

To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (Geneva, Switzerland)

12 May 2026

Eritrea: Extend the Special Rapporteur’s mandate, move the accountability agenda forward

Excellencies,

Ahead of the UN Human Rights Council’s 62nd session (15 June-10 July 2026), we, the undersigned non-governmental organisations, write to urge your delegation to support the development and adoption of a strong resolution that extends the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea.

Beyond spelling out and condemning the ongoing grave human rights violations committed by Eritrean authorities in a context of widespread impunity, this year’s resolution, which will be considered ten years after the Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Human Rights in Eritrea presented its final report to the Council, should among others request the Special Rapporteur to stock-take on options and processes available to address past and ongoing violations and ensure accountability and justice.

~ ~ ~

The Human Rights Council’s 62nd regular session will open in a context of increasing regional tensions, in particular between Eritrea and Ethiopia,¹ while Eritrea’s human rights situation remains of utmost concern. In addition to the grave violations outlined in previous civil society letters,² which continue with impunity, the country’s domestic situation has severe and far-reaching effects on the Eritrean diaspora, who often face extraterritorial attacks (which the Special Rapporteur has identified as acts of “transnational repression”³) aimed at maintaining control, silencing peaceful dissent, and discouraging criticism of the authorities.

One year after the adoption of resolution 59/1,⁴ which extended the Special Rapporteur’s mandate, Eritrea’s human rights situation has not fundamentally changed. In late 2025, Eritrea released over a dozen detainees who had been in detention for over 18 years, including in solitary confinement. Yet, thousands of prisoners remain in arbitrary detention. In fact, this year will mark 25 years since the arrest of “G11” reformists—eleven government officials who called for democratic reforms and have been held incommu-

¹ See The New Humanitarian, “Regional mega-war? How renewed conflict in Ethiopia could pull in Sudan,” 23 March 2026, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2026/03/23/regional-mega-war-renewed-conflict-ethiopia-sudan>; as well as BBC, “Ethiopia accuses Eritrea of preparing for war as Red Sea tensions rise,” 9 October 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cyv6r6e6800o>; International Crisis Group, “Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tigray: A Powder Keg in the Horn of Africa,” 18 February 2026, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/brf/africa/ethiopia-eritrea/b210-ethiopia-eritrea-and-tigray-powder-keg-horn-africa> (all accessed on 8 April 2026).

² See the 2025 letter, DefendDefenders et al., “Eritrea: Adopt a strong resolution extending the Special Rapporteur’s mandate,” 22 May 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/eritrea-adopt-strong-resolution-sr-mandate/> (accessed on 8 April 2026), as well as previous letters (mentioned in the 2025 letter, footnote 1). These violations include, among others, arbitrary arrests and detentions, including incommunicado detention of journalists, dissenting voices and religious adherents; violations of the rights to a fair trial, access to justice, and due process; torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; enforced disappearances; conscription into the country’s abusive national service system and associated violations; violations of economic, social and cultural rights; and severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms, leading to a total closure of civic space in the country.

³ “Situation of human rights in Eritrea: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker,” UN Doc. A/HRC/56/24, 7 May 2024, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5624-situation-human-rights-eritrea-report-special-rapporteur> (paras. 60-70 in particular).

⁴ Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/59/1>

nicado since September 2001. Over 10,000 people are estimated to be in arbitrary detention in Eritrea, including politicians, journalists, priests and students. The recent release of 13 long-term detainees, many of whom were held in conditions amounting to torture, does not address the systemic nature of violations.⁵

To date, the Eritrean authorities have refused to implement decisions, concluding observations and calls by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), including to release detainees.⁶ Eritrean authorities also failed to use the country's membership in the Human Rights Council (2019-2024) to improve the domestic human rights situation or to engage in a serious dialogue with the international community. As the Council is turning 20, Eritrea remains among the very few States that have never received any official visit by a special procedure mandate-holder.

In June 2016, the COI on Eritrea released its final report, in which it found that it had "reasonable grounds to believe" that crimes against humanity have been committed in the country since 1991 and that "Eritrean officials have committed and continue to commit the crimes of enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, other inhumane acts, persecution, rape, and murder." It added that crimes against humanity have been committed "in a widespread and systematic manner in Eritrean detention facilities, military training camps and other locations across the country" as part of "a campaign to instil fear in, deter opposition from and ultimately to control the Eritrean civilian population."⁷ No adequate follow-up has been mandated by the Council to date. Despite the COI's work and reports by successive Special Rapporteurs and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on ongoing violations, no Eritrean official has been held accountable for these crimes.

Eritrea remains ranked 180th (out of 180 countries) in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Index and is currently rated as "Closed" in the CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor, with a score of 4/100—the worst in Africa.⁸

~ ~ ~

At the Council's 59th session, in June 2025, the Eritrean Government did not only oppose the annual resolution aiming to extend the Special Rapporteur's mandate. In an unprecedented move, it tried to capitalise on the UN's financial crisis and the backdrop of attacks on multilateralism to present its own draft resolution aimed at ending international scrutiny of Eritrea. Entitled "Discontinuation of the Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea," L.1/Rev.1, if it had been adopted, could have created a precedent used by other States to discontinue Council mechanisms such as special procedure mandates and independent investigations.⁹ It was roundly defeated by a recorded vote (four votes in favour,

⁵ See Human Rights Concern – Eritrea, "23 Years of Silence: Eritrean Authorities Must End Impunity, and Release All Prisoners of Conscience," 18 September 2025, <https://hrc-eritrea.org/23-years-of-silence-eritrean-authorities-must-end-impunity-and-release-all-prisoners-of-conscience/>; "Eritrea's Release of 13 Long-Term Detainees Welcomed, But Thousands Remain in Overcrowded Cells, Solitary Confinement, and Metal Shipping Containers," 23 December 2025, <https://hrc-eritrea.org/eritreas-release-of-13-long-term-detainees-welcomed-but-thousands-remain-in-overcrowded-cells-solitary-confinement-and-metal-shipping-containers/>; Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Eritrea: Recent releases of detainees encouraging," 15 December 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/12/eritrea-recent-releases-detainees-encouraging> (both accessed on 9 April 2026).

⁶ See ACHPR resolutions, decisions and concluding observations mentioned in DefendDefenders et al., "Eritrea: Extend the Special Rapporteur's mandate through a substantive resolution," 28 May 2024, <https://defenddefenders.org/eritrea-extend-sr-mandate-substantive-resolution/> (accessed on 9 April 2026).

⁷ See the COI's page at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-i-eritrea/commissioninquiryonhrin-eritrea>, as well as Human Rights Council, "UN Inquiry finds crimes against humanity in Eritrea," 8 June 2016, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2016/06/un-inquiry-finds-crimes-against-humanity-eritrea> (accessed on 9 April 2026).

⁸ See <https://rsf.org/en/index> and <https://monitor.civicus.org/> (accessed on 9 April 2026).

⁹ Hassan Shire/DefendDefenders, "Eritrea: Do Not Create a Precedent, Maintain HRC Scrutiny; All States should oppose attempts to discontinue the Special Rapporteur's mandate," 23 June 2025, <https://defenddefenders.org/eritrea-dont-create-precedent/>; Hilary Power/Human Rights Watch, "UN Rights Council Rejects Bad-Faith Bid to End Eritrea Scrutiny," 4 July 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/04/un-rights-council-rejects-bad-faith-bid-to-end-eritrea-scrutiny> (accessed on 8 April 2026).

25 against, with 18 abstentions) and, after the rejection of a last-minute oral amendment presented by Sudan, resolution 59/1 was adopted by a broad margin (23 votes in favour, four against, with 20 abstentions). Rewarding the Eritrean Government's use of these tactics to undermine scrutiny should not be an option as it will only weaken the Council institutionally and abandon victims of human rights violations in the country. Rather, the Eritrean Government's actions and tactics strengthen the case for more substantive resolutions on Eritrea, going beyond technical rollovers (mandate extensions).¹⁰ They are a clear sign of the positive impact that the Special Rapporteur's work has had, including documenting violations and keeping a spotlight on the country. Continued scrutiny from the international community is essential.

In a context in which Eritrea refuses to meaningfully cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms, and considering that the cause of serious violations in the country is political in nature, rather than merely due to a lack of capacity or resources, the provision of technical assistance and capacity-building would at this time be neither efficient nor adequate to address the country's challenges.

Instead, it is critical for the Human Rights Council to produce a substantive assessment of Eritrea's human rights situation. In addition to all the violations outlined in pre-2019 resolutions, COI and Special Rapporteur reports, and successive civil society letters, the upcoming Council resolution should address, among others:

- **The impact of Eritrea's domestic situation abroad**, including extraterritorial attacks (which the Special Rapporteur has identified as acts of "transnational repression") against the diaspora, as well as violations committed by Eritrean forces abroad¹¹ and the need to ensure accountability and justice for these acts; and
- **Adequate follow-up to the Council's action on Eritrea so far**, in particular the COI's recommendations. In addition to the need to continue monitoring and reporting, the Special Rapporteur should be mandated, as part of his next report, to present an assessment of the evolution of Eritrea's human rights situation in the context of the ten-year anniversary of the final report of the COI on Eritrea and include a stocktaking of options and processes available to address past and ongoing violations and ensure accountability and justice. This may include updating the COI's work through documentation and evidence collection.

~ ~ ~

Eritrea's human rights situation requires urgent attention and an adequate level of public reporting and debates—meaning more than once a year. At its 62nd session, the Council should adopt a resolution that:

- (a) Extends the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea;**
- (b) Urges Eritrea to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur, including by granting him access to the country;**

¹⁰ From 2012 to 2018, Djibouti and Somalia were the main co-sponsors of Eritrea-focused resolutions. When they discontinued their leadership, in 2019, a group of states (and later the European Union) took over the initiative. Since then, however, Council resolutions on Eritrea have been short and procedural, as they focused on extending the Special Rapporteur's mandate. As such, they have largely failed to reflect the country's situation in the way Council resolutions did prior to 2019, as well as the atrocities Eritrean forces have committed in Ethiopia's Tigray region. For background, see DefendDefenders et al., "Eritrea: The annual Council resolution should outline the country's human rights situation and extend the Special Rapporteur's mandate," 17 May 2023, <https://defenddefenders.org/eritrea-hrc-strong-resolution-2023/> (as well as the Annex, which contains an analysis of successive Council resolutions on Eritrea (2012-2022)).

¹¹ Eritrean forces have been credibly accused of grave violations of international law in Tigray, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, since the conflict broke out in November 2020. These violations, including against Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia and against the local population, and the associated complete lack of accountability, deserve the Council's attention.

Several civil society organisations have called for the reinstatement of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) or the creation of a similar investigative mechanism on Ethiopia. In early 2026, after years of denial, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed admitted for the first time that Eritrean troops had committed atrocities in Aksum and other parts of Tigray during the war in the northern Ethiopian region (BBC, "Ethiopia PM hits out at Eritrea over atrocities in Tigray," 3 February 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c74vdpnj301o>).

- (c) Condemns the ongoing grave human rights violations committed by Eritrean authorities in a context of widespread impunity, including in the context of extraterritorial attacks, which the Special Rapporteur has identified as acts of “transnational repression”;**
- (d) Requests the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur to present updates on human rights in Eritrea at the Council’s 64th session in an enhanced interactive dialogue that includes the participation of civil society;**
- (e) Requests the Special Rapporteur to present a comprehensive written report at the Council’s 65th session and to the General Assembly at its 81st session, followed by interactive dialogues; and**
- (f) Requests the Special Rapporteur to incorporate in his next report: (1) an assessment of the evolution of Eritrea’s human rights situation in the context of the ten-year anniversary of the final report of the COI on Eritrea and the 25th anniversary of the detention of “G11” reformists, and (2) a stocktaking of options and processes available to address past and ongoing violations and ensure accountability and justice, and to the extent possible, an update of the COI’s work through follow-up documentation and evidence collection.**

We thank you for your attention to these pressing issues and stand ready to provide your delegation with further information.

Sincerely,

1. AfricanDefenders (Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network)
2. The America Team for Displaced Eritreans
3. Amnesty International
4. Burundian Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (APRODH)
5. Burundian Human Rights Defenders Coalition (CBDDH)
6. CIVICUS
7. Connection e.V.
8. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide)
9. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
10. ERISAT-Eritrean Satellite Television
11. Eritrean Coordination for Human Rights
12. Eritrean Movement For Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR)
13. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P)
14. Human Rights Concern - Eritrea (HRCE)
15. Human Rights Watch
16. Information Forum for Eritrea (IFE)
17. International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
18. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
19. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
20. Lawyers’ Rights Watch Canada
21. MIR Italy (Italian branch of IFOR)
22. Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l’Amitié entre les Peuples (MRAP)
23. Network of Human Rights Defenders in Central Africa (REDHAC)
24. Nigerien Human Rights Defenders Network (RNDDH)
25. One Day Seyoum
26. Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights
27. Release Eritrea
28. Senegalese Human Rights Defenders Coalition (COSEDDH)
29. War Resisters’ International
30. West African Human Rights Defenders Network (ROADDH/WAHRDN)
31. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)