



Universal Periodic Review (UPR) NGO Working Group Press Statement on the Request for Asylum by Ten (10) Members of Eritrean National Football Team

Ten (10) players from the Eritrean National Football team are seeking political asylum in Botswana, citing human rights violations in their country. On Tuesday 13 October 2015, the Eritrean national team played a World Cup qualifying match with the Botswana National Football Team. On Wednesday 14 October 2015, the players refused to board their plane home and were detained by police.

Eritrean football teams defected to Tanzania in 2009, Kenya in 2011, and Uganda in 2012, and were granted protection. Five Eritrean Olympic Players asked for asylum in the United Kingdom in 2012 and were granted protection.

- i) It was reported in the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Summary of 17 Stakeholders' submissions, prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights A/HRC/WG.6/18/ERI/3 dated 4 November 2013, that: '... an unknown number of people have been shot near the Eritrean borders for attempting to leave Eritrea illegally, in line with standing orders to implement a shoot to kill policy,'¹
- ii) '... physical and psychological torture was used regularly in prisons, military barracks and training camps ...'² and
- iii) 'exit visa, including for the purposes of studying abroad, were routinely denied to men below the age of 54 years and women below the age of 47 years as they were deemed to be of an age to undertake military service'³.

1. A Human Rights Watch Report has stated the following:

'... human rights conditions remain dismal. Indefinite military service, torture, arbitrary detention, and severe restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, and religion provoke thousands of Eritreans to flee each month'.

'Eritreans who were forcibly repatriated to Eritrea from Middle Eastern countries and then fled again told Human Rights Watch in 2012 they had been incarcerated in cramped cells

¹ HRCE, p4, para 19. (Human Rights Concern Eritrea, London, United Kingdom).

² HRCE, p3, para 17.

³ JS.1 p5 para 26.

and beaten shortly after their return. They displayed scars from beatings and electric shocks. One escapee reported that several prisoners in his group of returnees died from their beatings⁴.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Ms Sheila Keetharuth, has expressed her appreciation of the courage of Eritreans who have ‘Speak with her despite the real possibility of reprisals against themselves and their families in Eritrea’.⁵

We look forward to the decision to grant asylum to the Eritrean group on the basis of them refusing to return to Eritrea due to ‘well-founded fear’ of persecution, which has been documented and reported by international organisations, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Eritrea. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Ms Sheila Keetharuth, has expressed her appreciation of the courage of Eritreans who have ‘Speak with her despite the real possibility of reprisals against themselves and their families in Eritrea’.⁶

We the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) NGO Working Group, comprising **Botswana Council of NGOs (BOCONGO)**, **DITSHWANELO – The Botswana Centre for Human Rights**, **Kuru Family of Organizations**, **Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Botswana (LeGaBiBo)** and **MISA – Botswana Chapter** and **Rainbow Identity Association (RIA)** therefore:

Commend the Government of Botswana for declaring that Eritreans will go through the normal process of applying for asylum. We are convinced that the Government of Botswana is committed to international, regional and national human rights standards in accordance with Botswana’s membership of the African Union and the United Nations. These are the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees; the 1969 UN Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees; the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa; and the Botswana Refugee Act.

16 October 2015
Gaborone

⁴ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2014 Eritrea. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/eritrea>*

⁵ Statement by UN Special Rapporteur, Ms Sheila Keetharuth. 24 June 2015.

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