

National Service in Eritrea

The national service in Eritrea distinguishes itself by the severe abuses committed under it, the use of national service recruits as forced labour, and the indefinite nature. Some national service recruits have been working under harsh conditions, with long hours and little pay, for as much as 20 years.

[In 2016, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea](#) found that the national service constituted enslavement. It stated:

“The commission therefore finds that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Eritrean officials have committed the crime of enslavement, a crime against humanity, in a persistent, widespread and systematic manner since no later than 2002.”

It added that the enslavement was characterized by:

(a) the uncertain legal basis for the national service programmes; (b) the arbitrary and open-ended duration of conscription, routinely for years beyond the 18 months provided for by the decree of 1995; (c) the involuntary nature of service beyond the 18 months provided for by law; (d) the use of forced labour, including domestic servitude, to benefit private, PFDJ-controlled and State-owned interests; (e) the limitations on freedom of movement; (f) the inhumane conditions, and the use of torture and sexual violence; (g) extreme coercive measures to deter escape; (h) punishment for alleged attempts to desert military service, without an administrative or judicial proceeding; (i) the limitations on all forms of religious observance; and (j) the catastrophic impact of lengthy conscription and conditions on freedom of religion, choice, association and family life.

The Commission of [inquiry found that crimes against humanity, including enslavement, have been committed](#) and continue to be committed by the Eritrean regime. The Commission concluded:

Crimes of enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, persecution, rape, murder and other inhumane acts have been committed as part of a campaign to instil fear in, deter opposition from and ultimately to control the Eritrean civilian population since Eritrean authorities took control of Eritrean territory in 1991