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# Human Trafficking and Trauma in the Digital Era: The Ongoing Tragedy of the Trade in Refugees from Eritrea

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### Crimes against Humanity: The Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea

*Susan Höfner & Zara Tewelde-Berhan*

*The commission finds that systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the Government of Eritrea and that there is no accountability for them.*

(UNHRC, 2015, p. 14)

#### Introduction

In 2015 and 2016, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COIE) investigated the human rights situation, including the possibility of crimes against humanity, in Eritrea. The reports received widespread attention in the Eritrean community and beyond, sparking fierce debate. Pro-government supporters denounced the reports, saying that they lacked credibility and were not based on substantive evidence. However, many Eritrean refugees and human rights campaigners applauded the reports as confirmation of the ongoing gross human rights violations being committed by the Eritrean regime. While the Eritrean diaspora was particularly involved in the debate through demonstrations and on social media, those inside the country were largely silent.

In this chapter, we present the findings of the two reports from the COIE in 2015 and 2016 and examine the methodology used by the COIE to gather information. We also explore how these reports were received by supporters and opponents of the regime in the diaspora and describe the many forms of activism used by both sides to mobilise support against and in favour of the reports. Finally, we

look at the response from Eritreans inside Eritrea and their relative silence.

### **First report: Systematic and widespread, gross human rights violations**

In 2014, the COIE started investigating the human rights situation in Eritrea, pursuant to Resolution 26/24 of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) (UN General Assembly, 2014). The first report came out on 8 June 2015 (UNHRC, 2015a) and concluded that “[...] systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the Government of Eritrea and that there is no accountability for them” (*Ibid.*, p 14). The human rights situation, which the UN Commission found created a climate of fear, was recognised as the predominant reason for Eritreans to flee the country.

In investigating the alleged human rights violations, the UN Commission found grave grievances in relation to all public freedoms, stating that “Eritreans are unable to move at will, to express themselves freely, to practice their religion without undue interference, to enjoy unrestricted access to information or to have the liberty to assemble and associate” (*Ibid.*, p. 15).

Freedom of movement is highly restricted by the regime as the following statement of one of the witnesses, a former clerk in charge of issuing travel permits, shows:

*You cannot move wherever you want in the country. Whether you are civil or military, you need to show your paper to all checkpoints. There are check points everywhere. [...] You have to put the place where the person is going, you need to have a link. (UNHRC, 2015b, p. 103)*

The shoot-to-kill policy on the border, implemented by the military, adds an additional threat to anyone attempting to cross the border, as described by another witness:

*I crossed the border at night. When I climbed the mountain I lost my direction and I came to the valley instead. When I tried again the next morning, they saw me from afar, they shot at me. It was a steep slope; I got shot. I fell. They told me: come back, we will finish you off. I was afraid. They captured me. I was bleeding ... They beat me ... I was exhausted. They moved a bit and started discussing how they should finish me off. (UNHRC, 2015b, p. 319)*

Furthermore, the report presents records of the arbitrary arrest of persons, who are routinely subjected to different forms of ill-treatment, including torture, rape, and sexual abuse (of women and men):

*When I was going to visit my sister and a friend in Agordat, they thought I was trying to escape. I did not need permission for that travel because it was in our area within the same *zoba*. You need a special permission only if you go home ... I was put in prison for six months. I got tortured and abused... After one month in Agordat, they transferred me to Hadas, where I stayed for one week. After that, I was detained for one month in Keren, and then another month in Adi Abeito. After this they give me back to the police division. (UNHRC, 2015b, p. 208)*

The COIE found that many of these abuses take place during mandatory and open-ended national service, which it terms as a “practice similar to slavery”, which “[...] involves the systematic violation of an array of human rights on a scope and scale seldom witnessed elsewhere in the world” (*Ibid.*, p. 13).

One of the witnesses described his experiences of the national service as following: “I was in the military for 12 years. We used to collect stones, collect firewood, build roads, etc. I was never in a battle, never guarded a border or a building” (UNHRC, 2015b, p. 410).

The testimony of a former conscript, forced to work at Wi’a military camp, demonstrates the living conditions that are commonly experienced during national service:

*It was very intensive work, the climate was harsh. We worked all day long, every day. There were no days off. The food was terrible. People started to die. I do not know the exact reasons. A lot of people had night blindness, swollen legs and knees. It was very common to see people paralysed. Diarrhoea was the main problem. There was no medical treatment. There was no sanitation. There was a river about one km away where we could wash our clothes and bodies on Sundays and get drinking water. (UNHRC, 2015b, p. 420)*

In its concluding remarks, the Commission states that “[...] the violations in the areas of extrajudicial executions, torture (including sexual torture), national service, and forced labour may constitute crimes against humanity” (*Ibid.*, p. 14).

## **Second report: Crimes against humanity**

The 2015 report was followed by an extension of the mandate of the COIE for one more year to enable it to further investigate the systematic, widespread, and gross violations of human rights in Eritrea. The aim was to ensure full accountability, including the determination of whether or not there were violations constituting crimes against humanity. In its second report (UNHRC, 2016), the UN Commission took account of its critics who perceived the report as methodologically flawed, biased and without substantive evidence (Tsegay, 2016). It referred to, and took into account, the response by the Eritrean government, which saw the Commission of Inquiry’s report as a form of defamation and had sent a counter-report entitled: ‘*Commission of Inquiry report: Devoid of credibility and substance*’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

As part of its investigation in 2015/2016, the Commission gathered further testimonies, which substantiated the findings reported in 2015. Those testimonies confirmed the existence of forced labour, arbitrary arrest for indefinite periods, torture and degrading treatment. The Commission reports the testimony of a

former military trainer from the training camp in Sawa, who fled military service in 2012, speaking about his experience, he says:

*The trainers are very harsh. We were told if you don't apply pressure, they won't do what you say. We were not trained on how to treat people. They just instruct you to punish using 'military punishments'. In one incident a trainer named [...] tied up two people and left them in a tent. He tied them so tightly that we heard them screaming. Later, one was dead and the other's hands were crippled... If [the trainer does not] apply pressure to the trainees, [he] could end up in prison. (UNHRC, 2016, p. 54)*

Another witness described the situation of women, who are used as servants by military leaders and trainers in Sawa:

*We watched sexual abuses. Systematically, they forced girls to obey their instructions; to have a relationship with them. If she doesn't obey, they find any kind of military punishment. It is commonly the Division leaders, the highest ranks who would do that. All people would go back to their Division at the end of the day. The leaders select girls personally. After six months, he would change her, take a newly arrived. The 11th grade students...have to pass their last year's exam in Sawa. They take them. Once a woman is assigned to a General, they stay there [to] do office work, chores, etc. 'there is no rule, no law.' Sometimes when the girls see the car of the General approaching they hide. What if they become pregnant? [...] When it happens, they make abortion traditionally. The girl doesn't even want to let the colonel know. One of my best friends was a 'personnel' of the Colonel. He told me that the nick name used to get a girl is 'goat'. Sometimes when newcomers arrive they asked assistants to bring new ones. (Ibid. pp. 56–57)*

In total, 833 individuals in 13 countries<sup>42</sup> contributed to the two reports. Based on this evidence, the Commission concluded that there are “[...] reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed in Eritrea since 1991 [...]” (UNHRC,

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<sup>42</sup> Interviews were conducted in the following countries: Australia, Canada, Djibouti, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

2016, p. 83). Crimes such as enslavement, imprisonment, forced disappearance, torture and other inhumane acts, persecution, rape and murder, which were already mentioned in the previous report, were recognised as credible by the Commission in the second report. Furthermore, the Commission acknowledged that political power is concentrated in the hands of the president and a small circle of military loyalists (*Ibid.*, p. 81) and went on to conclude that the top-level officers of the National Security Office and military are responsible for most of the cases of gross human rights violations and crimes against humanity (*Ibid.*, p. 81).

### **Methodology of the COIE**

Despite the COIE's efforts to cooperate with the Eritrean government, they were denied access to the country and were not provided with information about the human rights situation, even after repeated requests. As the Commission could not enter Eritrea, it obtained first-hand testimonies in confidential interviews from more than 550 witnesses residing in third countries. In addition, it received 160 written submissions in response to a call made to relevant individuals, groups, and organisations in November 2014. These were included in its 2015 report (UNHRC, 2015b). In its second report, the Commission collected additional testimonies, bringing the total number of testimonies received to 833 (OHCHR, 2016). In addition, the criticisms (mostly mass petitions and letters) received following the 2015 report, were assessed, but when the signatories were contacted, many were found to be unaware that they had signed a petition or letter (*Ibid.*).

In both of the Commission's reports, the interviews were conducted in accordance with the methodology based on UN standards and best practices, and specific attention was given to gender-based violations, particularly violence against women and children, and the gendered impact of violence. The investigation covered the period from the end of the Ethiopian Eritrean War in

1991 until the present day and was limited to violations committed within the territory of Eritrea.

During its investigation, the COIE faced two major challenges. Firstly, although the Commission did the utmost to protect the identity of individuals who feared reprisals by Eritrean authorities, witnesses feared that they were being secretly monitored by Eritrean authorities and that their testimony would endanger their own safety or that of their family members back in Eritrea. Therefore, testimonies were treated as highly confidential and attention was paid to the protection of witnesses. In addition, the Commission undertook precautions to guarantee the unhindered access of individuals meeting with members of the Commission and reminded the host governments of their responsibility to ensure the protection of persons bearing witness (UNHRC, 2016).

Secondly, the Commission's investigation was impeded by the absence of reliable data concerning demographics, development, the economy and the legal system in Eritrea. Due to the lack of cooperation with and coordination by the Eritrean government, reliable statistical information was not available (*Ibid.*).

## **Response by Eritreans in the diaspora**

### ***Activism and campaigns***

The COIE report received widespread attention among Eritreans at home and abroad. This reaction resulted in activism in the diaspora among those who supported the report, as well as those who opposed it. Supporters of the report demanded accountability for the crimes against humanity committed by the Eritrean regime (OHCHR, 2016), while opponents called for the end of what they perceive to be hostility towards the Eritrean nation.

Campaigns were launched, reaching a peak as the COIE's presentation of the second report on human rights in Eritrea grew closer. The *Stop Slavery in Eritrea Campaign*, a campaign to end indefinite nation service in Eritrea, showed its support for the COIE's findings. In a press release, it welcomed the COIE's findings

that ‘crimes against humanity’ have been committed by the Eritrean government (Asmarino Independent, 2016). An Eritrean activist in the diaspora who strongly supports the COIE findings expressed the general feeling among supporters: “The findings confirmed what we already knew. In fact, it does not document everything, but tries to give a general picture of the horrendous situation the country is in” (Anon., personal communication, 14 December 2016).

Similarly, opponents of the COIE findings also campaigned and produced an online petition with 3,195 signatures (Adal Voice, 2015). With the slogan ‘Hands off Eritrea’, pro-government supporters backed by the Eritrean government campaigned against the report, using websites and social media, calling it “politically motivated” (Berhane, 2016). A pro-government website heavily criticised the COIE findings and referred to it as “not dead”, suggesting that further attempts to “undermine the country” were inevitable (Fitur, 2016). Such suspicious language adds to the suspicion of the international community some Eritreans in the diaspora feel.

After its first report came out in 2015, the Commission received 45,000 written submissions critical of the COIE’s first report, the majority of which were group letters and petitions (OHCHR, 2016). In a press conference, COIE Chairman, Mike Smith, acknowledged that receipt of this number of submissions was “unprecedented” (UN Web TV, 2016). However, he also stated that many of those who had submitted letters, when contacted directly, said that they had not even read the COIE report and were not aware that they had signed a petition or letter (*Ibid.*). Based on these findings, Smith stated:

*Our strong suspicion is this is a campaign that has been organised from Asmara and that their various supportive groups in the Diaspora around the world, youth and women’s union etc. have been mobilised to get signatures to these sorts of petitions... in all of those 45,000 we only received 8 from inside Eritrea. (Ibid.)*

Leaked documents from the Eritrean government posted by a Facebook page called ‘SACTISM’ confirm that the petition was set

up by the Eritrean government and revealed its strategy of mobilisation to denounce the COIE report and to gain support from the diaspora to campaign against it (SACTISM, 2016). The petition was addressed to Eritrean consulates, Eritrean representatives, and coordination officers abroad with the forceful request to fulfil an allocated country quota for signatures on the petition (Plaut, 2016c).

The leaked document stated a pre-defined target number of 500,000 signatures and included clear instructions for their collection by groups, organisations, and communities, which were assigned the responsibility to carry out this action. The petition was attached with a statement, denying the accusations of human rights violations, as listed in the COIE's two reports and praising the government's great development efforts and its support for social justice (*Ibid.*). Many of these statements turned out to neither have been written nor ever seen by the signatories, as the investigation by the COIE revealed in 2016 (UNHRC, 2016, p. 12).

The Eritrean government left many Eritreans living in diaspora with no choice but to sign the petition, as many feared that they would be denied services (such as obtaining official documents and assistance) from the Eritrean Embassy, as well as other repercussions. NRC, a major news outlet in the Netherlands reported that supporters of the PFDJ had gathered, including the ambassador of Eritrea in the Netherlands, and come up with the plan to go past doors to make people sign the petition. In the news article, Eritreans in the Netherlands indicated that they did not fully realise what they were signing, but that not signing would prevent you from using embassy services and/or have repercussions for any family member you may have in Eritrea. Thus, people were made to sign through the culture of fear (Chin-A-Fo, 2016). The leaked document of the Eritrean government is an indication that many of the signatures were involuntary and collected under pressure and/or threat (*Ibid.*). Moreover, it demonstrates the importance that the Eritrean government places on discrediting the COIE reports.

### *Demonstrations*

Campaigning was used by both sides to mobilise support and encourage the diaspora to attend demonstrations in Geneva. The Eritrean community organised large demonstrations in Geneva and other locations in June 2015 and again in June 2016 in support of the COIE findings (Aljazeera, 2016). Most of the attendees were young Eritrean refugees who had fled Eritrea in recent years. It is thought that an estimated 16,000 Eritreans attended the demonstration held in Geneva in support of the second COIE report, which accuses the Eritrean government of committing crimes against humanity (Asmarino, 2016a). Encouraged by the COIE reports, protesters called for an end to impunity and demanded that the Eritrean government be held accountable for crimes against humanity. Demonstrations were also held in support of the COIE by thousands of refugees in Ethiopia (outside the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa and in refugee camps in Northern Ethiopia) and in Israel.

Although fewer in number, those who vigorously opposed the report also organised a demonstration in Geneva, accusing the report of being “sinister with the intention to destabilise the country in the name of human rights” (Berhane, 2016). This accusation was expressed by demonstrators who said that the report was hostile to the Eritrean state and threatened Eritrea’s sovereignty. One explanation for this support is that many of those in the diaspora who support the regime have lived in exile for decades and, therefore, have not experienced the Eritrean government’s oppression first hand.

### *Social media*

Social media played a key role in mobilising Eritreans in the diaspora and as a source of information, especially for young people. Facebook, Twitter, and Paltalk, as well as popular Eritrean websites like Assenna, Asmarino, Awate, Erena, Eastafro, Tesfanews, and Shabait were frequently visited, allowing news relating to the COIE reports to circulate among the community. Hashtags on social media

in reaction to the COIE findings, such as ‘End Impunity in Eritrea’ and ‘Hands off Eritrea’, reached a large audience. Facebook was particularly influential with live videos of young activists encouraging the diaspora to attend the 23 June 2016 demonstration in support of the second COIE report (e.g., Stop Slavery in Eritrea, 2016). Activists from both camps (supporting and opposing the COIE report) effectively used social media to maximise their support base. Videos of popular figures such as musicians and families of victims were circulated, encouraging the diaspora to participate in the 23 June demonstration supporting the COIE findings.

An Eritrean activist who participated in a video campaign that was widely shared on Facebook demanded “Enough of lawlessness, yes to full accountability” (Stop Slavery in Eritrea, 2016). In the Facebook comments section of a heated Aljazeera discussion between Sheila Keetharuth, the UN Special Rapporteur and member of the COIE, and three members of the Eritrean diaspora, one member of the diaspora wrote: “The report is a blessing. Eritrean voices are finally being heard” (Aljazeera, 2015). This view is in contrast to another commenter who stated, “This accusation is totally fabricated and politically motivated” (*Ibid.*). This highlights the strong divide within the diaspora community on the COIE findings. This loud reaction by the Eritrean diaspora is in stark contrast to the reaction inside the country, which was largely silent.

### **Response by people inside Eritrea: Silence**

While Eritreans in the diaspora vocalised their reaction to the COIE findings, the population inside Eritrea remained silent. Those in support of the COIE findings would argue that this silence reflects the lack of freedom of speech, which is emphasised in the COIE reports. Reporters Without Borders ranked Eritrea last out of 180 for the eighth consecutive year in the 2016 World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Human Rights Watch, in its ‘World Report 2014’, confirms that the Eritrean government maintains a monopoly on domestic sources of information and that

the Internet and telephone communications are monitored (Human Rights Watch, 2014). The absence of a free press inside the country, the slow Internet connection and the fear instilled in the people have made it incredibly difficult for people inside Eritrea to get information and freely express their opinion.

In October 2016, leaked video footage from activists from ‘Arbi Harnet’ (‘Freedom Friday’) – a movement with members both inside Eritrea and in the diaspora – showed a local Internet cafe with a list of details of Internet users (Asmarino, 2016b). The movement confirmed on social media that the government was tightening the controls on Internet users by asking providers to record details of their customers (Arbi Harnet, 2016a). Arbi Harnet claimed that their members inside Eritrea believe that the new measures have been put in place in response to a rise in political awareness among the population inside Eritrea (*Ibid.*). Arbi Harnet also made almost 4,000 ‘robo’ calls (an automated telephone call which delivers a recorded message inside the country) encouraging Eritreans inside the country to show solidarity with the demonstrations in Geneva supporting the COIE findings (Arbi Harnet, 2016b).

Satellite radio is often listened to inside Eritrea, with Radio Erena and Assenna being the most popular. These radio programmes are independent and have covered the COIE’s findings and response in the diaspora. This extensive coverage – particularly in the months leading up to the June 2016 demonstrations – has given Eritreans inside the country information on developments. An article published on Assenna’s website analysed the COIE findings, creating greater awareness (Assenna.com, 2016). An Eritrean activist with credible sources inside Eritrea highlighted the general mood of the public inside Eritrea: “A lot of people thought it was the beginning of the end for the regime after the COIE Report. They thought some kind of action was going to be taken against the regime” (Anon., personal communication, 14 December 2016).

## Ongoing 'shoot-to-kill' policy and national service

Fresh reports have provided new evidence that the concerns of the Commission of Inquiry about crimes against humanity are still valid. Reports were released that the shoot-to-kill policy was still in place, the most recent of such incidents reported by the opposition group Arbi Harnet and contained the following information:

*On 22nd of October a light pickup truck left the city of Asmara carrying 7 young people and 3 children. Each had paid \$5,500 to be smuggled across the Eritrea-Sudan border. Seven of those aboard the truck were absconding national service recruits (5 women and 2 men). The three children (accompanied by an uncle) were on their way to join their mother who had previously fled from the country. At the town of Hykota, a short distance from the border, they were ambushed. The truck was hit by a hail of bullets in a co-ordinated attack ordered by a senior divisional commander. Many were killed outright; others fatally wounded. Among the dead was a young woman, Yohana Kabsay. Just 26 years old, she had one of the three small children on her lap. Yohana was a member of the 26th round of national service recruits who had been conscripted into the army. She had served with the 74th mechanised division for over two years. Following the carnage the wounded were loaded back on a truck, while soldiers went to hunt down those who had fled for their lives. No attempt was made to try to care for the wounded. Residents of Hykota report that the soldiers even stopped at a local teashop on their way to the hospital, by which time everyone was pronounced dead. Families of the victims were not informed and they were hurriedly buried. It took each family weeks to piece together what had happened. (Arbi Harnet, 12 December 2016, reposted by Plaut, 2016b)*

In a visit to refugee camps on the Ethiopian side of the border in May 2016, incidents of reports of shoot-to-kill practices at the border were also obtained (Interviews, by Van Reisen and Kidane, May 2016).

With regards to promises by the Government of Eritrea to increase wages to national service recruits, information from Arbi Harnet reveals that the pay promised has not been realised. The

government had promised that it would build houses for demobilised recruits, but there has not been such demobilisation, nor have the houses been built. Of more serious concern is the fact that national service remains indefinite. As well as military service, this is a system in which everyone is assigned jobs by the government (Arbi Harnet, personal communication, with Kidane, Facebook Messenger, September 2016). A respondent explains:

*[The use of the word 'job'] might suggest that there are paid jobs. A 'job' is assumed to be an occupation where people work to earn a living. In Eritrea, there has not been a vacancy or a job application for a government job for more than 18 years now. Most people spend years, sometimes more than a decade, trying to be able to get a release from work. In any case, if there were 'jobs', whether assigned or chosen, it would mean there is some degree of normalcy. But when you are assigned to work without pay, that is not a job, it is either national service or slavery. (Interview, Van Reisen with Z, Skype, 14 January 2017)*

The system of national service continues to keep the population in a system of slavery based on forced labour under dismal circumstances (Arbi Harnet, personal communication, with Kidane, Facebook Messenger, September 2016).

### **Response by the Government of Eritrea**

The Government of Eritrea has developed the argument that the methodology used by the Commission of Inquiry was inadequate, emphasising that the Commission did not visit Eritrea, although it had no permission to do so. The government has opened its doors to members of the diplomatic community and the media and a range of reports have been released as a result. A cable understood to have been sent by European diplomatic sources and reported by news agency FAZ on 6 January 2017 (FAZ, 2017) suggests that the Government of Eritrea has had some success in convincing governments to support it, citing geopolitical interests in the region.

As this book goes to print, Radio Erena is reporting that the Eritrean regime has arrested numerous film professionals accused of having worked with organisations outside Eritrea.

Serious drought was first reported in Ethiopia and Eritrea by the UN in June 2015. In addition, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2013), 60% of the Eritrean population was reported to be undernourished between 2011 and 2013. However, the Government of Eritrea has denied these reports as well as reports of a health crisis. Citing the Ministry of Information, which quoted the governments' statement that there was no need for extra measures and that the situation was normal, Martin Plaut, journalist specialising in the Horn of Africa, alleges that Eritrea is knowingly denying these realities (Plaut, 2016a). In a series of articles, Plaut demonstrated this based on evidence smuggled out of the country. In January 2017, UNICEF confirmed the situation described by Plaut (UNICEF, 2017).

In 2016, Arbi Harnet announced that there had been a cholera outbreak in Eritrea, based on evidence received from within the country. While the Ministry of Information acknowledged the outbreak, no health workers were deployed and no request for international assistance was made. Arbi Harnet distributed information via mobile phone on how to avoid infection. This information spread rapidly in Eritrea and, according to news reports, was the only information available to people inside the country (Asmarino, 2016a, 2016b).

People inside the country are not informed about the COIE and its conclusions from official media. They only hear about it through coverage of opposition media (Interview Kidane with Arbi Harnet activists inside Eritrea, 17 January 2017).

## **Conclusion**

Eritreans who are in opposition to the Eritrean government have long demanded accountability for the human rights abuses committed against the Eritrean people by the government. The

COIE report has become a key tool for achieving this accountability. The COIE reports concluded that crimes against humanity and other human rights abuses are systematic and widespread in Eritrea, and are ongoing. It went on to state that crimes of enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, persecution, rape and other inhumane acts have been committed and are still being committed in order to instil fear and control the population (OHCHR, 2016). The COIE reports have been a major factor in exposing the national service programme as a form of slavery. It also highlighted other major crimes against humanity, such as the ongoing shoot-to-kill policy at the Eritrean border.

The COIE presented several recommendations, including the referral of the report to the UN Security Council and subsequently to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. In addition, it is recommended that member states of UNHRC should offer protection to Eritreans fleeing and respect the principle of non-refoulement. It also urged the Human Rights Council to keep the situation in Eritrea on its agenda and invited the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate further.

Following the COIE report and recommendations, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution that recommended the report to be forwarded to all relevant UN organs, which includes the UN Security Council. The resolution also extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea in order to follow up on the COIE report recommendations. On 28 October 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur Sheila Keetharuth presented the findings of the COIE in the UN General Assembly. Following this, a resolution was tabled by both Djibouti and Somalia was presented on 28th October 2016, but did not receive enough support from both EU and African Member States in the General Assembly (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2016). What is clear is the seriousness of the allegations about crimes against humanity and the determination of Eritreans in their quest for accountability, freedom, and justice.

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