

Conditions of Eritreans in Kassala under the conflict in Sudan

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To accompany Situation Report 424 – EEPA HORN

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the conflict in Sudan has led to many challenges for the significant number of Eritreans residing in Sudan. The fighting between the armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), causing a worsening of living conditions in Khartoum and states affected by the war, have resulted in a wave of displacement and exodus. Because a significant portion of Eritrean refugees did not complete the necessary steps for asylum in Sudan, they face a variety of issues, which are summarised below.

2. Fleeing out of Khartoum

A number of Eritrean refugees residing in Khartoum have travelled to Kassala State to escape the ongoing war in the capital city. Those that made the journey, used two means of transportation. One of them was the normal buses which were found to be very expensive and risky as many Eritreans were abused on the trips that were organized by the Eritrean community. The role of the Eritrean community was to arrange the trips while Eritreans paid the cost of transportation. The number of Eritreans who fled to Kassala using normal buses independently is not known.

3. Intervention by the Sudanese authorities

The Sudanese authorities dealt differently with those that travelled via the trips organized by the Eritrean community. Those that held documents issued by the official immigration authorities, approximately 150 people, were deported directly to the camp in Shegarab, eastern Sudan.

Eritreans that did not hold official immigration documents, were divided into two groups in the transit areas before Kassala state. The first group was forcefully deported to the Eritrean border and handed over to the Eritrean authorities without referring to other authorities concerned with migrants. The number of people that were deported to Eritrea is unknown. One man died jumping from the bus heading to Eritrea and many that were deported have in recent days already been fleeing back to Kassala, Sudan, out of fear for persecution in Eritrea.

Eritreans in the second group, estimated to be 1,300 persons, were deported to Wad Sharifi camp by the 30th of April. Some members of this group demanded the option of voluntary return to their country, after which they were deported by the Commissioner for Refugee (COR) of Kassala State. The remaining members of the group, who accepted the option of completing the initial screening procedures, were kept in the reception centre in Wad Sharifi camp. Due to the poor services, many fled back to Kassala State on the first day.

According to COR Kassala, on the 4th of May 2023, 144 people were deported to Shegarab camp.

4. Conditions of Eritrean refugee centres

There are 4 reception centres conducting initial screening procedures of asylum seekers at the border entry points from Eritrea in eastern Sudan:

- Wad sharifi
- Al-Qarqaf
- Hamdayet
- Shegarab

From there, asylum seekers are deported to the main camp in Shegarab.

These centres are affiliated to COR, supported by the High Commissioner for Refugees, who is responsible for providing accommodation, whereas other services, such as food, are provided by national civil society organisations. The reception centres are designed to receive a maximum of 150 people. However, last week Wad Sharifi had been approached by around 1300 asylum seekers. As a consequence, there is overcrowding for long periods of time, leading to complaints by asylum seekers about the limited services and the restriction of movement.

Other challenges in the centre include:

- Weak funding by the High Commissioner, reflected by the quantity and variety of meals, especially for people with special needs and children. Usually, they provide two meals a day, and sometimes there are also meals for children and the elderly, but this service remains inadequate and substandard.
- The limited space in the centres, with negative impacts on the personal freedoms of the asylum seekers, especially women, and reducing the quality of the services provided.
- The reception centres are maximum 150km away from the accommodation centre in Shegarab. Asylum seekers are moved from in local assembly buses (non-air-conditioned). It is an arduous journey, especially in the hot fall and summer. The deportation vehicle is accompanied by a police patrol for protection purposes.
- The accommodation capacity inside these centres is sufficient in some months, when it is known that the number of asylum seekers is low, but when the waves of asylum seekers are larger than usual, the centres become overcrowded.
- The cost of renting a house or even a furnished room in Kassala has increased drastically due to the influx of people (both Sudanese and migrants) fleeing from Khartoum. The cost of food supplies has also increased.

5. Photos of Wad Sharifi reception centre on 30 May 2023



