

# **ERITREA: Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses receives unprecedented international attention**

JW.org (19.10.2016) – It is in Eritrea, more than anywhere else in the world, that Jehovah's Witnesses experience the most intense persecution. Since Eritrea gained independence in 1993, the Witnesses have been consistently imprisoned, tortured, and marginalized. They are persecuted because they remain politically neutral and refuse to take up arms against their fellow man.

Fifty-four of Jehovah's Witnesses are currently imprisoned in Eritrea. Over the past 22 years, all except one have been held without formal charges or a hearing. Three have been in prison since 1994 for their conscientious objection to military service.

## ***Worldwide concern increases***

Since the persecution began, human rights organizations and government agencies have condemned the suffering experienced by Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea. More recently, however, the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COIE), a UN mandated body, has brought unprecedented international attention to the plight of the Witnesses. In its first report released in June 2015 to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the COIE dedicated a section to the discriminatory and abusive treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses.

On June 21, 2016, the COIE presented its second detailed report to the HRC. The COIE urged Eritrea to "respect freedom of religion or belief" and to "put an end to the practice of arbitrary arrest and detention of individuals based on their

religious beliefs, in particular followers of specific religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, . . . and release immediately and unconditionally all those unlawfully and arbitrarily detained."

In its findings, the COIE concluded that Eritrea's "persecution on both religious and ethnic grounds" is contrary to international law and constitutes a "crime against humanity." The international community considers this persecution as one of the gravest human rights violations. The COIE will present an oral update to the UN General Assembly on October 27, 2016.

***Will Eritrea remedy its unjust treatment of the Witnesses?***

The international community of Jehovah's Witnesses is deeply concerned about their fellow believers in Eritrea. They earnestly appeal to the government of Eritrea to stop persecuting these sincere Christians and allow them to enjoy their fundamental and inalienable rights.