

# THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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From The European Association  
of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

Contribution to the Report of the U.N. High  
Commissioner for Human Rights on the  
implementation of the new review mechanism of the  
Human Rights Council, established by GA Resolution  
60/251 and by the Human Rights Council in Resolution  
5/1 of 18 June 2007 for the 6<sup>th</sup> session of the UPR  
(Dates of the WG: 30 November-11 December 2009).

# ERITREA

Marcel Gillet

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## **Development of difficulties**

Jehovah's Witnesses have been present in Eritrea since the late 1940s. Prior to 1994 they were allowed to perform civilian service, and they enjoyed relative religious freedom.

In a Presidential Decree dated October 25, 1994, President Afewerki declared that Jehovah's Witnesses who are Eritrean by birth have revoked their citizenship "by their refusal to take part in the referendum, and have reconfirmed their position by refusing to take part in the National Service, thus deciding to revoke their citizenship." Subsequently, all Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea were stripped of their basic civil rights. They were not allowed to work in any government offices, their business licenses were revoked, and their identity cards and travel documents were taken from them.

In 2007, Amnesty International published a report explaining the development of the difficulties faced by Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea:

*Three Jehovah's Witnesses remained held incommunicado at Sawa military camp near the Sudan border since 1994, when the government stripped all Jehovah's Witnesses of basic citizens' rights for refusing to bear arms or perform military service. Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested during the year bringing to 27 the number held without charge or trial.*

...

*The internationally recognized right of conscientious objection was denied. This applied particularly to Jehovah's Witnesses who refused military service (though not development service) on faith grounds.*

## **Current situation**

During 2008, the Eritrean authorities systematically stepped up their efforts to suppress Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea. On Tuesday, July 8, 2008, the authorities began conducting raids on the local residences of Jehovah's Witnesses. Long-time members of the congregations, men in their 50's, 60's and even 70's, were subsequently rounded up at their homes or places of work. In most cases, they were the breadwinners for their families. In all, 28 Witnesses were arrested in 2008, and two more were arrested in January 2009. Five of those arrested in 2008 have been released, one of whom was a 51 year old woman. Four others arrested prior to 2008 were also released.

Currently, 42 Jehovah's Witnesses are in prison for their religious beliefs (see list). Those imprisoned prior to July 2008 were arrested while attending Christian meetings, while publicly sharing their faith, or for their conscientious objection to military service. However, the reason for the arrest of those after July 2008 is largely unknown.

Jehovah's Witnesses cannot receive more than an 8th-grade education. When students register for high school in 9th grade, they are also required to register

for national military service. Upon completing the 11th grade, high school students are obliged to go to the Sawa military camp to complete their 12th-grade education while receiving military training. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses do not register for a high school education in order not to compromise their religiously motivated stand to refrain from participation in military training or service.

### **Torture**

Many of the individuals who were arrested and who refused to join the military have been severely beaten. For example, a 23-year-old man was arrested during 2006 and taken to the Wia camp where he was tortured. His legs and hands were tied behind his back and he was thrown on the ground where he was severely beaten. Afterward, he was hung up and the beatings continued. After being beaten on the testicles, he passed out. The torture lasted seven days.

Another individual, a 25-year-old man, was arrested and also taken to Wia, where he was cruelly beaten. His hands and legs were tied so tightly behind his back that only his belly touched the ground. In oppressive heat of more than 40 degrees Celsius, he was thrown on the ground in steep terrain that was drenched with water and was severely beaten for several days.

### **Length of imprisonment**

Three of Jehovah's Witnesses (Paulos Eyassu, Isaac Mogos, and Negede Teklemariam) have been imprisoned in the Sawa prison for more than 14 years. They are denied any visitors, including their families. They were imprisoned on September 24, 1994, because of their conscientious objection to military service for religious reasons. No charges have been filed against them and they have never been given a trial.

### **International Efforts to Assist Eritrean Witnesses**

For years, Jehovah's Witnesses have attempted to help their Eritrean fellow worshippers through diplomatic channels. They have visited and appealed to officials at European institutions and foreign ministries, the U.S. Department of State, officials in Africa, and Eritrean embassies, particularly in Germany and Italy. Biannually, the Office of General Counsel of Jehovah's Witnesses supplies a human rights report on Eritrea to various governmental agencies and NGOs that are concerned with human rights violations.

### **Conclusion**

We appeal to the authorities of Eritrea to promptly take positive steps to protect the freedom of religion of Jehovah's Witnesses and to release all those who are detained. We urge them to grant permission for a delegation of Jehovah's Witnesses to visit Eritrea to meet personally with President Afewerki to clear up any misunderstandings with a view to peacefully resolving these issues.

**FORTY-TWO IMPRISONED JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**  
**As of March 18, 2009**  
**(Listed by Date of Imprisonment)**

<b>Name of Prisoner</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Prison</b>	<b>Date Imprisoned</b>	<b>Reason for Arrest</b>
1. Paulos Eyassu	37	male	Sawa Camp	September 24, 1994	Conscientious objection
2. Isaac Mogos	34	male	Sawa Camp	September 24, 1994	Conscientious objection
3. Negede Teklemariam	36	male	Sawa Camp	September 24, 1994	Conscientious objection
4. Aron Abraha	36	male	Sawa Camp	May 9, 2001	Conscientious objection
5. Mussie Fessehaye	38	male	Sawa Camp	June 2003	Conscientious objection
6. Tsegabirhan Berhe	45	male	Sawa Camp	January 24, 2004	Religious meeting
7. Ambakom Tsegezab	34	male	Sawa Camp	February 2004	Conscientious objection
8. Fesseha Ghebrezadik	25	male	Sembel Prison Asmara	June 2004	Religious activity (4-year sentence)
9. Bemnet Fessehaye	39	male	Sawa Camp	February 2005	Conscientious objection
10. Henok Ghebru	26	male	Sawa Camp	February 2005	Conscientious objection
11. Worede Kiros	53	male	Sawa Camp	May 4, 2005	Religious activity
12. Tekle Tesfai	75	male	Sembel Prison Asmara	May 27, 2005	Religious activity (5-year sentence)
13. Yonathan Yonas	24	male	Sawa Camp	November 12, 2005	Religious activity
14. Kibreab Fessehaye	32	male	Sawa Camp	December 27, 2005	Conscientious objection
15. Bereket Abraha Oqbagabir	42	male	Sawa Camp	January 1, 2006	Conscientious objection
16. Yosief Fessehaye	20	male	Sawa Camp	2007	Conscientious objection
17. Amanuel Abraham	-	male	Sawa Camp	2007	Conscientious objection
18. Mogos Gebremeskel	63	male	Mai-Serwa	July 3, 2008	Unknown
19. Bereket Abraha	62	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	July 8, 2008	Unknown
20. Mesgina Gebretinsai	59	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	July 10, 2008	Unknown
21. Goitom Gebrekristos	72	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	July 11, 2008	Unknown
22. Ermias Ashgedom	16	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	July 11, 2008	Unknown
23. Habtemichael Mekonen	68	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	July 17, 2008	Unknown
24. Tareke Tesfamariam	59	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	August 4, 2008	Unknown
25. Tesfai Teklemariam	56	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	August 5, 2008	Unknown

<b>Name of Prisoner</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Prison</b>	<b>Date Imprisoned</b>	<b>Reason for Arrest</b>
26. Natnael Ghebreyesus	33	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	August 6, 2008	Unknown
27. Goitom Aradom	65	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	August 8, 2008	Unknown
28. Haile Merhu	49	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	August 8, 2008	Unknown
29. Habtemichael Tesfamariam	61	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	August 8, 2008	Unknown
30. Tewoldemedhin Habtezion	50	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	August 9, 2008	Unknown
31. Ghebrehiwet Ghebremichael	67	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	August 22, 2008	Unknown
32. Yohannes Haile	65	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	September 18, 2008	Unknown
33. Teferi Beyene	68	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	September 23, 2008	Unknown, a publisher
34. Beyene Abraham	57	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	October 23, 2008	Unknown, publisher, formerly served as elder
35. Kahsai Mekonnen	76	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	October 25, 2008	Unknown
36. Asfaha Haile	75	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	December 2, 2008	Unknown
37. Semere Negussega	72	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	December 22, 2008	Unknown
38. Muse Paulos	64	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	December 23, 2008	Unknown
39. Tsehaye Leghesse	69	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	December 23, 2008	Unknown
40. Tsegezeab Tesfazghi	60	male	5 <sup>th</sup> Police Station	December 23, 2008	Unknown
41. Tsehaye Tesfamariam	68	male	2 <sup>nd</sup> Police Station	January 5, 2009	Unknown
42. Robel Woldekidan	31	male	Unknown	January 27, 2009	Caught while trying to flee to Sudan