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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human Rights Situation in Eritrea

Each year, thousands of Eritreans flee their home country. Most of them decide to flee because of the unlimited military service, because of arbitrary arrests, torture, forced labor. There is no freedom of the press, no freedom of expression or religion. Given Eritrea's shoot-to-kill policy at the border, most Eritreans make their way out by paying smugglers.

In the 2016 worldwide press freedom index by Reporters without borders, Eritrea is on rank 180, the last in the index. All independent media outlets were shut down in a comprehensive crackdown in September 2001. The fate of eleven journalists who were jailed in September 2001 remains unclear. Many journalists have joined thousands of Eritreans and fled the country. Those who remain and work for state media are forced to repeat statements by the authorities instead of being allowed independent research.

No civil society groups are permitted; strikes are not allowed. In order to keep their citizenship Eritreans in the diaspora are forced to pay 2 per cent of their monthly income to the government. In case they do not pay their remaining family in Eritrea is punished or they are denied reentry into Eritrea.

An involuntary service in the army is enforced with brutal measures – including torture and ill-treatment. The estimated 300,000 Conscripts work on government projects such as construction or mining and farming. It is extended indefinitely Eritrea's government is partly justifying the forced recruitment with being threatened by the neighboring country. The two countries have been involved in murderous proxy wars in the region for years.

The only option to help end the exodus of the young Eritreans would be to agree on a safety guarantee for Eritrea and a more balanced policy for the Horn of Africa. It is therefore important that Ethiopia honors the 2002 ruling by an international commission in The Hague that stated that Eritrea has the legal rights to a disputed territory that both countries claim for themselves.

Concerning the freedom of religion, the state is always among the lowest-ranking countries. Even though religious freedom was written into the 1997 constitution, the government has only approved four religions: Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Catholics, and members of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. Members of churches who are unregistered are frequently arrested. A government decree from 2002 dictated that all religious groups must register or stop their religious ceremonies. About 2,500 of the approximately 10,000 political prisoners in Eritrea are detained for religious reasons. Most of them are evangelical Christians or Pentecostals. At least 49 people who belong to Jehovah's Witnesses have been locked up for years without trial. The former Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Abune Antonios has been under house arrest since 2007 because he had protested against the state's interference with church-internal matters.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the government of Eritrea to:

- End the involuntary and life-long service in the army,

- End religious persecution and release the political prisoners including Patriarch Abune Antonios,
- Allow for an independent media,
- Disclose what happened to the journalists who were detained in 2001 and release all incarcerated journalists,
- End the “shoot-to-kill” policy regarding on its border.