

UN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN ERITREA BEGINS OPERATIONS

Written by
Thursday, 27 November 2014 23:32 -

20 November 2014

The Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate human rights violations in Eritrea has begun its operations with an initial meeting in Geneva.

The United Nations Human Rights Council established the Commission of Inquiry in June 2014 for a period of one year to “investigate all alleged violations of human rights in Eritrea” as outlined in the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea, whose mandate was created by the Human Rights Council in June 2012.

“Our key aim is to help provide Eritrea with the means to improve the human rights of its population,” said the Commission Chairperson, Mr Mike Smith. “Our work is guided by respect and care for the Eritrean people and their proud history, as well as international human rights standards.”

Mr Smith, Adjunct Professor at Macquarie University in New South Wales, Australia, and former Executive Director of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, is working with Ms Sheila B. Keetharuth, who is the current Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, and Mr Victor Dankwa, Associate Professor at the University of Ghana and former member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.*

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The Commissioners have come together for the first time in Geneva this week, and are holding key meetings with a number of diplomatic missions, including Eritrea, United Nations agencies, scholars and civil society organisations. They have also been discussing the strategy, methodology and investigative approach they will employ during their mandate.

“We have a clear mandate from the Human Rights Council. The Council has expressed its strong condemnation of the ‘continued widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms committed by the Eritrean authorities’” said Mr Dankwa.

Ms Keetharuth stated “We are committed to reach out to the people of Eritrea to understand the impact of the current situation on the enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. In particular, we are keen to look at the reasons why Eritreans, including unaccompanied minors, are fleeing the country in their thousands”.

The Commissioners said that they wish for the full cooperation of the Government of Eritrea and to this end have met their representative in Geneva and have asked for full access to the country. “We are hoping that this first meeting in Geneva augurs well for future co-operation with Eritrean authorities,” noted Mr Smith.

The Commission of Inquiry, supported by a team of experienced human rights officers, is

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publishing a call for submissions to encourage interested individuals, groups and organisations to share information with the Commissioners.

The Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea was established by Human Rights Council resolution 26/24 to investigate a variety of alleged violations, including extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detention, torture, restrictions to civil liberties, human trafficking, discrimination against women and sexual and gender-based violence, violations of child rights, lack of rule of law, and precarious living conditions.

The Commissioners will undertake a first official visit to Switzerland and Italy from 27 November to 4 December 2014 to collect first-hand information on the human rights situation in Eritrea from Eritrean refugees, migrants and other members of the diaspora, as well as other relevant sources.

The Commissioners are holding their first press briefing on Thursday, 20 November, at 10.00 a.m. in the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

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*Biographies of Commission of Inquiry members:

Mr Mike Smith (Australia) –Adjunct Professor in the Department of Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism at Macquarie University in New South Wales, Australia. From November 2007 until July 2013, he was an Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations in New York and Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. Prior to that, he was Australia’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva. In 2004, he was chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Ms Sheila B. Keetharuth (Mauritius) – was appointed in October 2012 as the first Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea. Until June 2012, Ms Keetharuth was the Executive Director of the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), a pan-African NGO based in Banjul, The Gambia. A lawyer from Mauritius, Ms Keetharuth has extensive experience in research, advocacy, litigation and training in Africa.

Mr Dankwa (Ghana) – is Associate Professor at the University of Ghana and chairs the Constitutional Review Implementation Committee of Ghana. He was a Member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights from 1993-2005 serving as its Vice-Chair, Chair and as the First Special Rapporteur on Prisons and Detention Centres in Africa (1996-2000). He was Senior Member of the Faculty of Law, University of Ghana (1972-2005), and a Senior Member at the Department of International Law, University of Limburg, The Netherlands (1985-1987).

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UN Human Rights, country page – Eritrea: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/AfricaRegion/Pages/ERIndex.aspx>

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