**Eritrea: The Fight against Human Trafficking**

By: Ray J. A. – June 19, 2013

Running rampant in the backstreet brothels of Southeast Asia, occurring in abundance across (in)famous red-light districts throughout continental Europe, readily existing within the Americas, and especially prevalent across Africa, human trafficking constitutes a truly global issue. Not only is the human trafficking phenomenon a direct assault on human dignity, it is now categorized as a violation of human rights and is illegal in many countries. Annually, it is believed that between hundreds of thousands and several million individuals (typically women and children) are lured, kidnapped, or forced into sexual slavery, labor exploitation, or organ theft.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Notably, in recent years, the Horn of Africa region has experienced a spike in trafficking (in various guises), with Somalis[[2]](#endnote-2), Ethiopians[[3]](#endnote-3), and Sudanese[[4]](#endnote-4) all being affected. Eritrea, which borders the aforementioned countries, has also been affected, although in a far more peculiar nature. Specifically, the small country has been the victim of external organized criminal trafficking rings, which have targeted Eritrean youths. There are numerous harrowing accounts of Eritreans suffering unfathomable levels of criminality, depravity, and exploitation at the hands of organized criminal trafficking rings.

Much of the trafficking phenomenon in regards to Eritrea has been both fomented and enmeshed within a shadowy external political agenda, seeking to destabilize the country, with traffickers using vicious propaganda to target Eritrea in a malicious and unlawful campaign. In essence, traffickers and organized groups have sought to weaken the Eritrea human capital, its armed forces, and its defensive capabilities by robbing it of its skilled and educated youth. This notion is supported by the fact that some countries have a policy that grants political asylum to any Eritrean who deserts the army, right in nearby Sudan or Ethiopia, far before applicants even reach their final location for granted asylum. Moreover, consider that in 2007, the UNHCR acknowledged (although via passing mention) that “…some members of the United Nations peacekeeping mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) were involved in human trafficking.”[[5]](#endnote-5) Recognizing that its people are its greatest asset, Eritrea has maintained a dedication to anti-trafficking, employing a multifaceted approach to eradicate the problem.

In June of 2007, Eritrean representatives attended a conference in Uganda[[6]](#endnote-6), jointly organized by the UNODC's Regional Office for Eastern Africa and the Eastern African Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization through the International Criminal Police Organization's sub-regional office. The conference brought together representatives from 11 total countries, with the aim of raising awareness, strengthening preventative measures, seeking to reduce demand factors, and coordinating more effective support and protection mechanisms for victims.

In December of 2008, according to a Wikileaks cable entitled *How To Escape From Eritrea,* Charge d’Affaires, Matthew D. Smith, confessed that “the GSE [Government of the State of Eritrea] is very keen to break these human smuggling rings and dispatches agents to pose as potential customers. Other agents pose as facilitators, making all of the supposed smuggling arrangements prior to having the unsuspecting person arrested.”[[7]](#endnote-7) In July of 2011, Eritrean President, Isaias Afwerki met with UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon on the sidelines of South Sudan’s independence celebrations to discuss human trafficking (amongst several other issues).[[8]](#endnote-8) That meeting was subsequently followed by a formal letter, in February of 2012, from President Isaias to Ban Ki Moon, calling for an open, impartial, and transparent investigation into human trafficking within Eritrea and the greater Horn of Africa region.[[9]](#endnote-9)

In recognition of the broader nature of the human trafficking phenomenon, Eritrea has also sought regional and international cooperation. April of 2013 saw Eritrea participate in tripartite meetings with regional neighbors Egypt and Sudan to discuss ways of curbing human trafficking and ensuring the safety of their respective citizens.[[10]](#endnote-10) As one clear outcome of these meetings, several weeks later Egypt sent troops to the lawless Sinai region in a show of force against traffickers and kidnappers.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Most recently, in May of 2013, Eritrea sent a high level delegation to the UN General Assembly's *High-Level Meeting on the Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking.* In his statement during the meeting, Eritrea’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Osman Saleh, reiterated Eritrea’s long and strong commitment to fighting human trafficking and recounted several of the concrete methods undertaken to combat trafficking.

With human trafficking being a complex, multi-factor issue, Eritrea’s approach to combatting trafficking has involved a variety of strategies and procedures. In order to create awareness, Saleh noted that Eritrea has instigated comprehensive educational campaigns. In order to support victims, it was mentioned that Eritrea has provided assistance through diplomatic missions and communities in destination countries. Finally, illustrating little tolerance for traffickers, the Minister stated that Eritrean enforcement agencies and local communities have sought to identify and apprehend traffickers.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Human trafficking is an issue that continues to affect many people throughout the world. Trafficking’s underlying links to the lack of peace, global and regional instabilities, socio-economic inequalities, and underdevelopment mean that no single solution will suffice. In regards to Eritrea, undoubtedly, much more can and should be done on the part of the government, Eritrean citizens globally, and the international community. However, it is also important and pragmatic to recognize Eritrea’s past anti-trafficking efforts in order to provide strengthened and more effective strategies moving forward.

1. [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and analysis/glotip/Trafficking\_in\_Persons\_2012\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Trafficking_in_Persons_2012_web.pdf) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Tanzania-accuses-14-Somalis-of-human-trafficking/-/2558/1760098/-/ya927k/-/index.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.irinnews.org/report/97826/migrant-voices-ethiopians-in-yemen-describe-kidnapping-and-torture> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <http://cofs.org/home/sudanese-victims/> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=463ef21123&date=2007-10-09&cat=Africa> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.irinnews.org/report/72856/east-africa-human-trafficking-on-the-rise> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=08ASMARA575> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.innercitypress.com/ban1silence071411.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <http://www.embassyeritrea.org/press_statements/2013_Feb05_Letter_frm_PIA_2_SG.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/04/16/morsi-holds-talks-with-eritrea-and-sudan/> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/21/world/middleeast/egypt-sends-show-of-force-to-sinai-after-kidnappings.html?_r=0> [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/ga11369.doc.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)