



DEFEND DEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 53rd regular session

Item 2: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea

Oral statement

Delivered by: Nicolas Agostini

Mr. President, Mr. Special Rapporteur,

Thank you for your report. As you outlined, Eritrean government violations continue unabated. They include arbitrary arrests and detentions, violations of the rights to a fair trial, enforced disappearances, severe restrictions on civic space, widespread impunity for past and ongoing violations, and conscription into the national service system, including conscription for indefinite periods of national service. Since last year, the government conducted waves of roundups to identify people it considers draft evaders or deserters, punishing their family members.

In addition, Eritrean forces are credibly accused of grave violations of international law in Tigray. These violations, and the associated complete lack of accountability, deserve the Council's attention.

We welcome the Council's continued attention to Eritrea's human rights situation. Item 2 is the product of historical circumstances; by any standard, Eritrea belongs in item 4 as it remains one of the most serious situations in Africa and in the world.

Mr. President,

When it became a Council member, Eritrea hoped it would be shielded from scrutiny, even after the Commission of Inquiry found that there were "reasonable grounds to believe" that crimes against humanity had been committed in the country since 1991.

Eritrea did not evade scrutiny. Since 2019, however, resolutions on the country have been merely procedural. They contained no substantive assessment of Eritrea's situation.

For the violations it continues to commit, for its refusal to cooperate with the Council's mechanisms, for its appalling failure to fulfil any of the Council's membership criteria, the Eritrean government should now face stronger action in the form of a substantive resolution that:

- Clearly describes and condemns violations; and
- Renews the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

Thank you for your attention.