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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Joint written statement* submitted by Interfaith International, Al-Hakim Foundation, Centre du Commerce International pour le Développement., Rencontre Africaine pour la defense des droits de l'homme, non-governmental organizations 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.

[4 February 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



We Remind the World of the Continued Detention of Patriarch Abune Antonios, Head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, since January 2006

Since January 2006 Patriarch Abune Antonios has endured illegal house arrest in the Eritrean capital, Asmara. He continues to be held under duress, with state agents ensuring that he cannot leave the premises. There has never been an opportunity for him to question and challenge this illegal detention in a court of law. He is detained arbitrarily and without charge or trial, solely at the whim of the Eritrean President and ruling clique in government. He is being held virtually incommunicado, and is deprived of all contact with clergy and friends.

His imprisonment since January 2006 makes him one of the longest serving prisoners of conscience in Eritrea. His courage in resisting calls by the authority to submit his church to total governmental control caused him to suffer prolonged persecution and enforced silencing within his own country. His detention is neither recognised nor accepted by the legitimate church representatives and members, despite many government attempts to replace him with a more compliant priest.

The patriarch's detention violates at least six fundamental principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, found in Articles 3(liberty of person), 8 (effective remedy), 9 (no arbitrary arrest or detention), 11 (presumed innocent until proven guilty), 13 (freedom of movement), 18 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), all of which have been denied him.

It is vital that the nature of his imprisonment is recognised by the international community for what it is – arbitrary detention. Victims of these arbitrary legal measures could not leave their houses or meet with more than one person, or communicate with the outside world. At this stage in the history of Eritrea, it may be appropriate to note the similarities in the treatment of persons disapproved of by the authority.

Our organization urges Eritrean authorities to respect the rights to freedom of religion and belief and to release all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience unconditionally.

We call upon all member states of the United Nations Human Council to put pressure on the government of Eritrea to release the 92-year-old Patriarch, who has been unjustly kept in isolation, away from the people and church he loves dearly.

Forum de Dialogue Interculturel et Interreligieux (FICIR), NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.