

39 Students Beaten, Jailed for Faith in Christ

According to a statement on the official Eritrean Ministry of Information website, 17,000 students of the 26th national service intake graduated on July 13.

According to the announcement, all these students had successfully completed eight months of academic studies and four months of mandatory military training. These students will now proceed to senior secondary school to complete grade 12.

A group of 39 students, including 11 female students of the same intake who also completed the training, have been excluded from the graduation ceremony and have instead been placed under harsh military punishment at the Sawa military training center.

Sources told Open Doors that the arrests came as a result of the students' "Christian beliefs and for their commitment to Christ." The youths are now enduring beating, forced hard labor and insufficient food and water. Sources said authorities are also threatening the students with long imprisonment and exclusion from university should they "fail to renounce Christ."

Since the beginning of the year, Christians belonging to groups outside of the government-sanctioned Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran churches have faced a widespread arrest campaign. More than 200 men and women of various ages have been arrested since the beginning of the year and are being detained without charges under harsh circumstances.

One 85-year-old woman is being held in a shipping container and has contracted pneumonia. She is still being refused medical attention because she will not agree to camp

authorities' terms for receiving medicine. Military training forms part of the Eritrean curriculum. But after completing school, all Eritreans must also do national service.