

Totalitarian Government of Eritrea Beats, Detains 125 Christians

Over the past week, 125 Christians have been beaten and detained in Eritrea.

“Police arrested these church members from homes and workplaces during broad daylight and then marched them through town to the police station while beating them,” an investigator for Open Doors reported to Worthy News.

Among the 125 Christians, 45 men and women were arrested on Feb. 27 for worshiping outside highly regulated government-approved churches in Eritrea. According to Worthy News, all of the 125 individuals detained were members of an evangelical denomination located in the southwestern town of Barentu.

Worthy News has reported that the Eritrean government has denied any wrongdoing in regard to the arrests.

Eritrea, sometimes referred to as the “North Korea of Africa,” has been ruled by President Isaias Afwerki and his Popular Front for Democracy and Justice Party since the country gained independence in 1993. Since taking power, the Afwerki regime has instituted a totalitarian government that seeks to control all aspects of life in Eritrea, including the religious practices of its citizens.

“Being a Christian in Eritrea is like living in hell,” a source inside Eritrea told International Christian Concern. “Christians are treated like enemy No. 1.”

Paranoid about losing power, the Afwerki regime targets any religious activity conducted outside highly regulated government churches. According to the United States Commission

on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), “Systematic, ongoing and egregious **religious freedom** violations continue in Eritrea. These violations include: torture, sometimes resulting in death, arbitrary detention and prolonged bans on religious activities.”

It is estimated that more than 2,000 Christians remain imprisoned in Eritrea. As ICC’s source in Eritrea can attest by personal experience, the conditions these prisoners are exposed to are among the most inhumane conditions in the world. Afwerki has stated that his restrictive policies on religion are aimed at groups that have been “duped by foreigners [and] are seeking to distract from the unity of the Eritrean people.”

ICC Regional Manager for Africa William Stark said, “Christians in Eritrea continue to be rounded up and arbitrarily imprisoned by the increasingly repressive government. The prison conditions these Christians are exposed to defy all international human rights standards. Prisoners have testified to being locked in tiny, pitch black cells for months on end, tortured, starved and constantly abused, both mentally and physically, by prison guards.

“It is estimated that at least 200,000 refugees have fled Eritrea because of its repressive policies,” he continued. “Many of these refugees expose themselves to extreme dangers to escape Eritrea, including being summarily executed by border guards and becoming prime targets for human traffickers operating in East Africa. By allowing these blatant human rights abuses to take place, the international community has allowed Eritrean Christians to become a forgotten people that can be beaten, detained and killed at the whim of a paranoid government.”