

The strange anomaly: The Eritrean Dictator Iseayas Efewerqi to Act as Referee (*arbitro* አርቢትሮ) in U.N. Human Rights Council

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[The New York Times](#)

US, Rights Groups Say UN Rights Council Vote Lets Abusers In

By The Associated Press

- Oct. 12, 2018

UNITED NATIONS — Human rights groups and the United States said U.N. Human Rights Council elections Friday gave abusive countries a seat at a table where they should be called out, as nations including the Philippines and Eritrea won an uncontested election.

Eighteen countries, ranging from India to the Bahamas to Denmark, were chosen in a U.N. General Assembly vote.

With no competition, each candidate got well over the 97 needed votes, including the Philippines, widely condemned internationally for a deadly drug crackdown, **and Eritrea**, which has faced criticism from a commission set up by the council itself.

"Elevating states with records of gross human rights violations and abuses is a tremendous setback," said Amnesty International USA's advocacy director, Daniel Balson. "It puts them on the world stage, and moreover, it empowers them to fundamentally undermine notions of human rights that are accepted internationally."

U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley said the "lack of standards continues to undermine the organization and demonstrates again why the United States was right to withdraw from it" in June.

The U.N. missions for Eritrea and the Philippines didn't immediately respond to inquiries about the vote and the criticism. Eritrea's mission tweeted that the Horn of Africa nation "will work for enhanced dialogue and (an) effective" Human Rights Council.

U.N. officials, meanwhile, declined to opine on the vote results but suggested all council members should be open to scrutiny of their own handling of human rights.

"It's clear that the world expects the members of international bodies to abide by a certain set of standards of behavior consistent with the bodies they have been elected to," said Monica Grayley, a spokeswoman for General Assembly President Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces.

The 47-member Human Rights Council can spotlight abuses and has special monitors watching certain countries and issues. It also periodically reviews human rights in every U.N. member country.

Created in 2006 to replace a commission discredited because of some members' sorry rights records, the new council soon came to face similar criticism. The U.S. left partly because it saw the group as a forum for hypocrisy about human rights, though also because Washington says the council is anti-Israel.

The Philippines will join at a time when President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs has left more than 4,800 mostly poor suspects dead in clashes with police, by the government's account; rights groups say the toll is much higher. Over 155,000 other people have been arrested in the two-year-old campaign, which has alarmed Western governments, U.N. groups and rights organizations.

Duterte has denied condoning unlawful police killings in the drug war, though he has repeatedly threatened death to drug dealers.

Eritrea hasn't held a presidential election since independence in 1993, and rights groups have long accused the country of having a harsh system of military conscription that has spurred many citizens to flee. A U.N. commission of inquiry in recent years found widespread human rights abuses, including forced labor. The government said the allegations were unfounded and one-sided.

Eritrea recently reached a peace agreement with neighboring Ethiopia after decades of war and unease, but it remains to be seen whether the conscription system will change.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other rights groups also raised red flags about some other countries elected to the council Friday, including Bahrain and Cameroon.

Bahrain has been cracking down on dissent. In Cameroon, rights activists say civilians have been subjected to abuses amid fighting between English-speaking separatists and government security forces, and it is thought that thousands of people who fled the violence were unable to vote in Sunday's presidential election.

Bahrain's and Cameroon's U.N. missions didn't immediately respond to inquiries Friday.

The new members of the Geneva-based council also include Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, the Czech Republic, Fiji, Italy, Somalia, Togo and Uruguay.

Top Reactions

• H



Happy Rickyesterday

Here are the current members of the UN Human Rights Council, with the majority being Human Rights Abusing Countries:

•Iraq •Cuba •China •Qatar •Angola •Burundi •Pakistan •Venezuela •DR Congo •Afghanistan
•Saudi Arabia •United Arab Emirates

ReplyReplies (3)

• E



Everyman4 hours ago

If Israel would stop violating UN resolution after resolution, the others would do it too. But we protect Israel unconditionally, so others feel empowered to do the same.

ReplyReplies (2)

12

• a



anthonyk12232 days ago

When I was young, I was taught in school how great the UN is. Now myself and most other Americans have come to the realization that the UN is a totally worthless organization that has been hijacked by terrorist nations. We should exist the UN. It needs to expire just like the League of Nations which was another joke.

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World

Eritrean exodus intensifies after peace with Ethiopia



Chris Stein AFP • October 12, 2018

1 / 3

People wait at a registration centre on the Eritrean side of the Eritrea-Ethiopia border. The rate at which Eritreans have sought refuge in Ethiopia has increased dramatically, according to the United Nations, as the soldiers who once arrested refugees now simply record their names as they cross over.

People wait at a registration centre on the Eritrean side of the Eritrea-Ethiopia border. The rate at which Eritreans have sought refuge in Ethiopia has increased dramatically,

according to the United Nations, as the soldiers who once arrested refugees now simply record their names as they cross over (AFP Photo/Michael TEWELDE)

Zalambessa (Ethiopia) (AFP) - For three years, fear and poverty kept Nebyat Zerea from leaving Eritrea to find her husband, until the day last month when the border with Ethiopia reopened and everything changed.

The whirlwind peace process between the arch-enemies that began earlier this year has seen flights restarted and embassies re-established, but perhaps no development has affected Eritreans like the border's September opening.

Since then, the rate at which Eritreans have sought refuge in Ethiopia has increased dramatically, according to the United Nations, as the soldiers who once arrested refugees like Nebyat now simply record their names as they cross over.

"I had to take this chance to leave the country now," she told AFP a few days after arriving in the Ethiopian border town of Zalambessa with her three daughters, all under six.

Refugee arrivals have jumped to about 390 per day from around 53, and Ethiopian authorities have registered more than **6,700** new arrivals since the border's opening, according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR.



Migration out of Eritrea is nothing new: hundreds of thousands of people have fled the notoriously repressive and economically moribund country in recent years, with many making perilous journeys through deserts and across the Mediterranean to Europe.

Eritrea's normalisation of relations with Ethiopia raised hopes that President Isaias Afwerki would roll back policies driving the migration.

Chief among these is his country's indefinite national service programme, which forces citizens into specific jobs at low pay and bans them from travelling abroad.



But no changes have yet been announced, and the Eritrean exodus has only intensified with peace.

"It was not my interest to go to another country, but in the end I was forced to," said Daniel Hadgu, a recent Eritrean arrival in Zalambessa who aims to reach his sister in the Netherlands.

- Voting with their feet -

Once a province of Ethiopia, Eritrea voted to separate in 1993 after a bloody, decades-long independence struggle.

It was back at war with its southern neighbour in 1998 when a dispute over their shared border turned violent.

While the fighting stopped in 2000, relations remained stalemated and the border stayed sealed after Ethiopia refused to abide by a UN-backed boundary demarcation.

In 2001, Isaias, Eritrea's only leader since secession, shut down the independent press, jailed dissidents without trial and made indefinite the national service scheme, which the UN has likened to "slavery".

The policies, which Isaias has said were necessary in case the Ethiopians attacked, stymied businesses and fuelled emigration.

"There's nothing to do, no business," 18-year-old Jamila Abdela said as she stood among dozens of recent Eritrean arrivals in Zalambessa. "I am just looking for a better life."

- 'Where are they going?' -

The cold war seemed intractable until the April inauguration of Abiy Ahmed as Ethiopia's prime minister, who soon announced his government would hand back the disputed territory.

Abiy and Isaias signed a peace pact in July, and in September, visited Zalambessa together to re-open the land border.

In a foreshadowing of things to come, Eritrean spectators stormed across the barren no man's land separating the two countries after the leaders had concluded their brief ceremony.



In the past, Eritrean troops would turn back migrants like Nebyat, who had made one unsuccessful attempt to cross the border during its closure.

The alternative -- paying a smuggler -- was beyond her means.

Today, Eritrean soldiers in tents at the border merely log the names of travellers, and all

Nebyat said she had to do was pay for a bus to Ethiopia, the first stop on a long journey to Germany, where her husband wound up after emigrating three years ago.

"We can't survive in Eritrea. We don't have any income," she said.

On a recent afternoon, fresh arrivals from Eritrea congregated on a Zalambessa back street, clutching backpacks and registering with local officials.

"Daily, people are passing by here," said Taeme Lemlem, a bar owner in the town who's watched the refugees with puzzlement. "I'm wondering, where are they going?"

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