

Asylum-Seekers from Sudan and Eritrea in Israel

Currently there are 42,147 asylum-seekers in Israel. Among them are 30,595 from Eritrea and 8,232 from the Sudan. Together, these two groups comprise 92% of asylum-seekers in Israel (according to data from the Population and Immigration Authority, April 2016). Israel has adopted a policy of non-expulsion, and grants them 'temporary group protection'. They stay in Israel legally and are required to renew their visas with the Interior Ministry monthly or bi-monthly.

The Situation in Eritrea

Eritrea is a small country in eastern Africa, with a population of about 6 million residents. It has a one-party government, which is considered one of the most closed and oppressive dictatorships in the world. **Two detailed reports on the subject of Eritrea were recently published by the United Nation's Inquiry Commission (June 2015 and follow-up report June 2016). The reports are over 500 pages long and are based on the accounts of 833 witnesses, clearly document that the Eritrean government systematically perpetrates extensive human rights abuses approaching the level of crimes against humanity.** The whole population is drafted into army service for an indefinite period. They are forced to do compulsory labor in service of their commanding officers under conditions of slavery. In response to any attempt to protest the government or army service, citizens are imprisoned without trial and undergo severe torture. Eritrea denies political freedoms to its residents and restricts freedom of expression and movement. All channels of communication are controlled by President Isaias Afwerki. Journalists, government ministers and even public and religious figures who criticized the ruling government have been detained, and their fate is not known. In Eritrea, performing any religious ritual outside the framework of one of the four recognized religions is outlawed. Believers of other faiths are susceptible to being detained and tortured.

Despite the small population, the harsh conditions of life in Eritrea have turned it into one of the largest 'exporters' of refugees in the world.

Eritreans comprised the second-largest group of asylum seekers (after Syrians) among refugees in Europe in 2014. According to the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees, several thousand Eritreans are fleeing every month.

Only since 2013 has Israel permitted Eritreans to submit requests for asylum. Since then, 2,408 Eritreans have submitted requests for asylum. Only 4 of these have been recognized as refugees. While in Israel the percentage of Eritreans recognized as having refugee status stands at 0.4%, according to UN statistics, throughout the world each year between 80% and 90% of Eritrean asylum-seekers are recognized as refugees in accordance with the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or supplementary protections.

The situation in the Sudan

Sudan is a large country in central Africa. Its population of 39 million residents suffers from deep and fundamental ethnic and religious divisions. The Sudan is ruled by a military dictatorship dominated by the ethnically Arab-Muslim sector.

In the Darfur region, located in western Sudan, in the context of an ethnic territorial dispute, Arab militia attacked villages and committed acts of mass murder and rape. **Since 2003, the genocide in Darfur has claimed the lives of close to half a million people and more than 2.7 million were displaced from their homes. The UN declared this situation the most severe humanitarian crisis in the world.** In 2009 an international arrest warrant was issued for the President of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, following his indictment by the International Criminal Court in Hague for war crimes and genocide in the Darfur region.

The Nuba Mountain region on the southern border of the Sudan is home to tribal populations, some Muslim and some Christian, who oppose Sharia law which has been imposed on the region since 1984. **Rebel groups attempting to overturn the regime suffer from policies of mass eradication, under which tens of thousands of people were killed or starved to death in the last decade of the 20th century. The slaughter in the Nuba Mountains began again in 2011, with airstrikes by the Sudanese army and ‘ethnic cleansing’ massacres. Those remaining in the area are in danger of starvation due to lack of access to humanitarian aid.**

The majority of asylum-seekers from the Sudan who reach Israel are fleeing from the atrocities occurring in these two regions of the country.

<p>In 2008 Israel granted temporary residency to 500 Sudanese from Darfur as a one-time humanitarian gesture. Consideration of requests by Sudanese asylum-seekers began in 2013. Of the 3,165 requests for asylum submitted, only 45 were accepted and only a single Sudanese has been granted refugee status. While in Israel the percentage of Sudanese recognized as refugees stands at 0%, in Europe almost 70% of Sudanese asylum-seekers are recognized as refugees in accordance with the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or supplementary protections</p>
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